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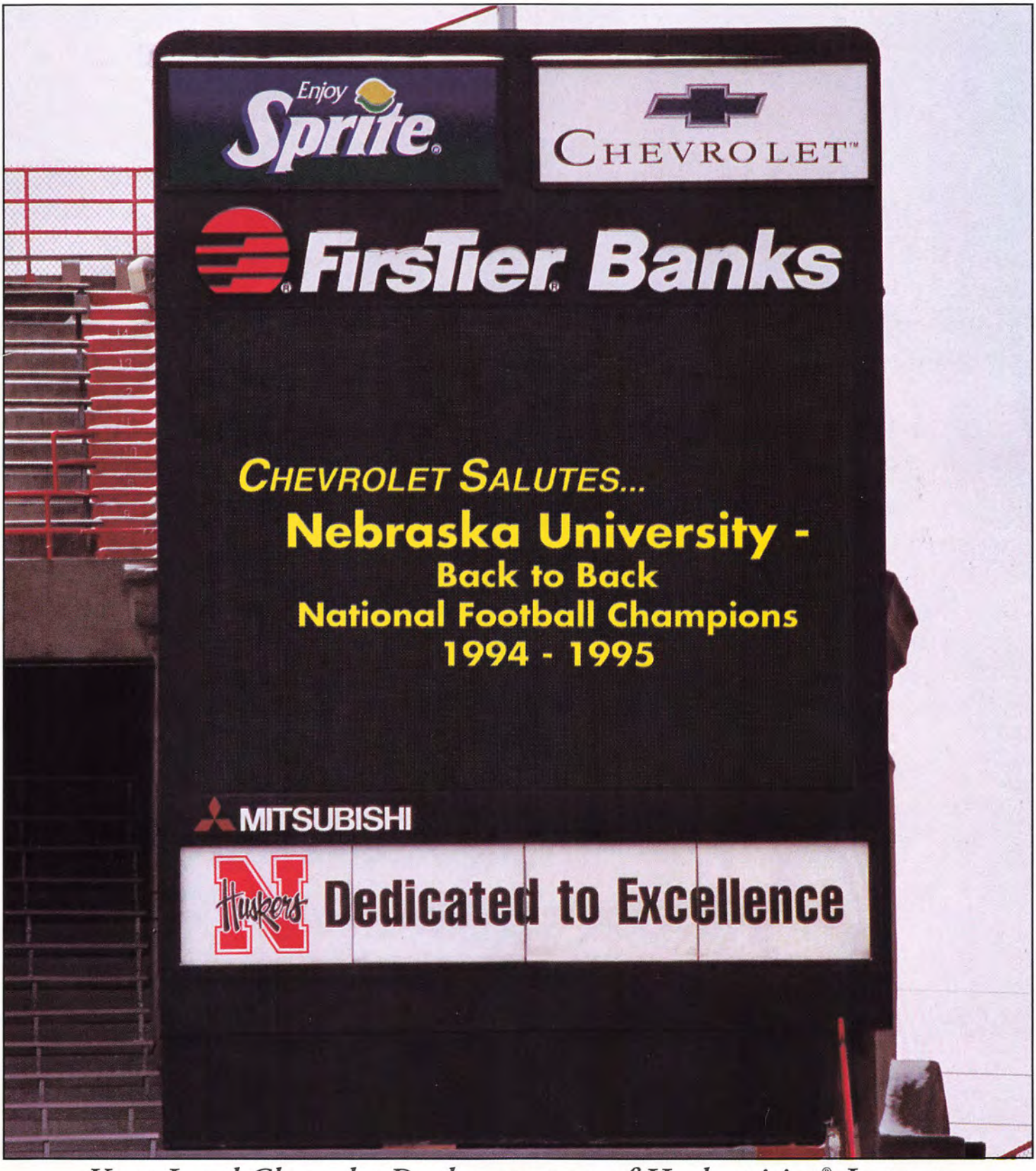

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Moments after escaping from the grasp of eight Florida defenders, Fiesta Bowl MVP Tommie Frazier found himself all alone on his way to a 75-yard touchdown run and a place in Husker history.

Photo by Eric Francis

NEBRASKA SPORTS™ Magazine

Volume 3, No. 10

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Cover photo by Eric Francis

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from the letter editor

For most people, change can be a difficult thing. As you read this, the staff of Nebraska Sports Magazine is preparing for a big change that we think is a positive one.

Beginning next month, Nebraska Sports Magazine will become "Nebraska Sports America." Why the change? The name will better reflect the nature of our coverage as we continue to grow and expand in 1996 and beyond.

As Nebraska Sports America (NSA), we will continue to provide you with the same excellent stories and photos about sports in Nebraska that made NSM so popular. But at the same time, our planned expansion into several other Midwestern states will allow us to provide you with better coverage of the Big 12 Conference and several professional sports teams, including the Kansas City Chiefs and the Kansas City Royals.

SPORTS America

We have big plans for 1996, including expanded coverage of golf and the Summer Olympics. And this spring, we'll publish our annual College World Series issue and a special preview of the Big 12 Conference.

We'll see you next month as Sports America!

Sean Weide

Please send comments to Nebraska Sports Magazine, 4115 South 133rd Street, Omaha, NE 68137-1105, or call (402) 333-8544 or (800) 333-8544 outside the Omaha area. Visit our site on the World Wide Web at http://www.nesports.com. Comments also can be sent via e-mail to Nebraska Sports Magazine at nesports@synergy.net or by facsimile to (402) 551-4710.

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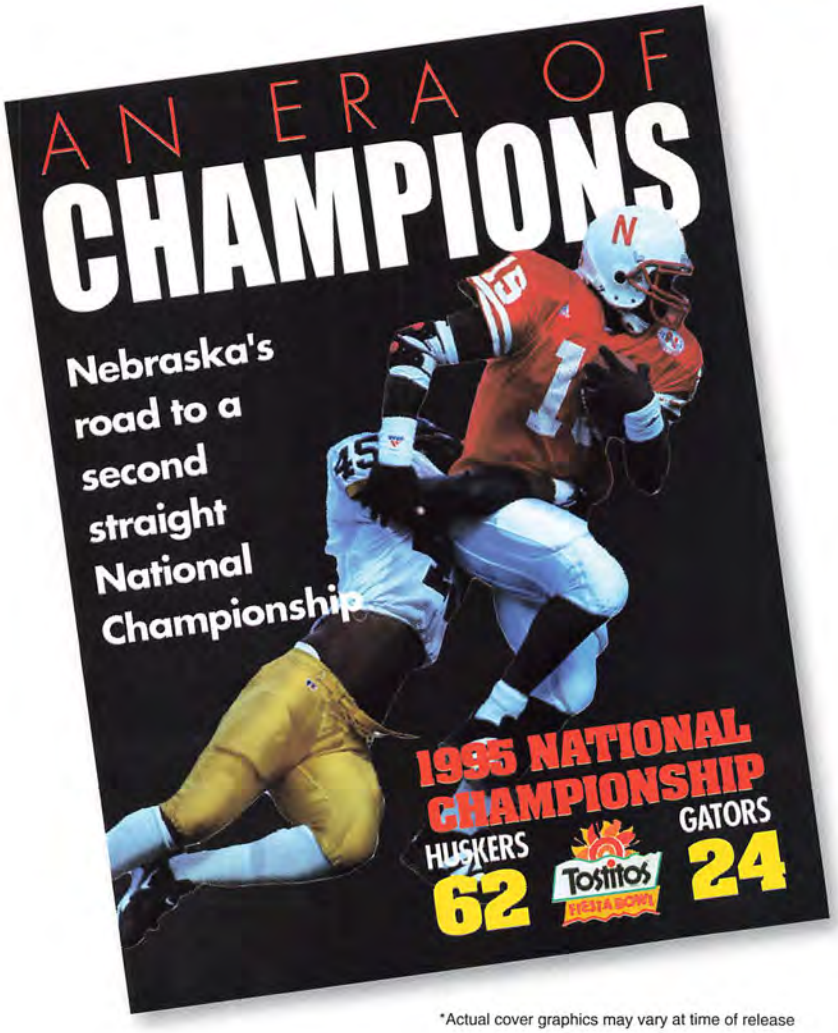

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letters to nsm

"I am sending in for three subscriptions as gifts to my sons for Christmas. I am a subscriber to your sports magazine and I love it. I never discard them, I just read them over again. I am 85 years old and I truly love football and your magazine."

Verna Brand, Fremont, Neb.

Enjoyed Reading 'Volleyball Dynasty'

I enjoyed reading the story behind Bellevue West's "Volleyball Dynasty" in the November issue. The writer, Cory Golden, did a fine job of describing one of the state's all-time best sports programs, which has, in turn, contributed to raising the level of play of volleyball players throughout the state. Keep those "Special Reports" coming!

James Morton
Omaha, Neb.

Time To Review Policy On Youth In Sports

Which way is it going to be? "Little League Football — Too Serious, Too Soon" or "A Volleyball Dynasty." Both articles addressed the serious issue of youth sports.

As an educator/coach, I know what is appropriate for a high school student is not educationally appropriate for a 10-year-old. The "educational" athletic models appear to be the same.

I believe it's time for the superintendents, principals, athletic directors, coaches, parents and volunteers to read their district and the NSAA's educational/activity philosophy. We would all be surprised by what we profess to do.

Steve Shadle
South Sioux City, Neb.

1984 Orange Bowl Video Hard To Find

I live in the state of Iowa but I have been a faithful Husker fan since their run for the national championship during their 1983 season. Over the last few years I have been recording their New Year's Day bowl games. I'd like to get a nice collection going but I feel that I need a cassette of the 1984 Orange Bowl between Nebraska and Miami. I have looked around now for almost two years and have come up empty-handed. Would you know of who to contact to get my search going in the right direction?

Sandy Gibney
sandy_gibney@
ccs_hawk.ccs.k12.ia.us

An entire collection of Nebraska football games from 1970-present is available through Husker Video. Call 1-800-230-3831 for details.

— Editor

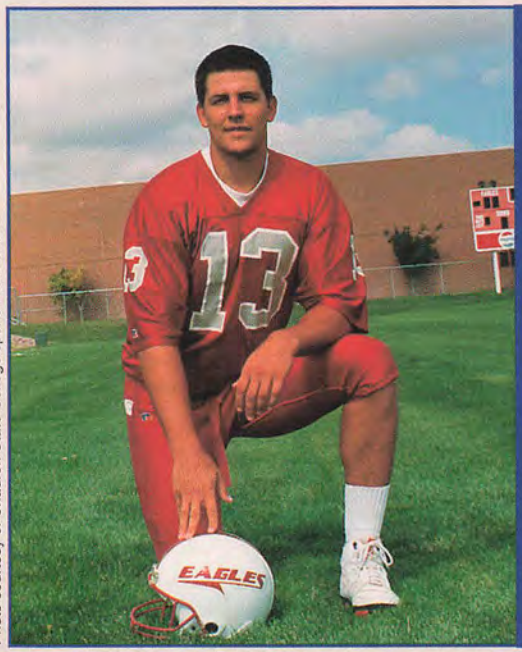

Photo courtesy of Chadron State College sports information

Failed to mention Joe Planansky

In reading your last issue, I noticed that you failed to mention Joe Planansky as an NFL player with Nebraska ties. Like Don Beebe before him, Planansky had a great career at Chadron State College as a receiver.

Although he was not drafted, Planansky was invited to the Miami Dolphins camp and made the team as a member of the practice squad. When Eric Green went down with an injury, Planansky saw playing time against the New York Jets.

The Hemingford native is still with Miami and may have a future as a third tight end/long snapper in the NFL. All of us in Western Nebraska are proud of Joe and forgive you for your omission.

Peter Thompson
Sports Director, KDUH-TV
Scottsbluff, Neb.

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!

Letters

Letters to Nebraska Sports Magazine may be mailed to: NSM Letters, 4115 South 133rd Street, Omaha, NE 68137-1105.

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Unusual Uniforms Not So Unusual

Husker fans certainly have taken notice of the Nebraska men's basketball team's new "Voltage" uniforms. The eye-catching apparel — produced by Converse — comes with matching shoes and features an aggressive zig-zag design.

The look is not unique to Nebraska, however. Six Division I men's basketball teams are sporting the Voltage design this season, including two of the Huskers' opponents — Oklahoma and Minnesota. The Sooners, unlike the other five schools, have opted only to wear their new uniforms when they play away from home.

"The schools don't have to wear them at home and away," said Ellen Pulda, senior manager of public relations for Converse. "It might have something to do with the way the uniforms look."

We agree. NSM

The new Voltage uniforms feature a design that strikingly resembles automobile tire tracks.

Omaha Hoop-It-Up Team Finishes 'Best of Rest'

Point Per Possession, runners-up at the Omaha-Council Bluffs Hoop-It-Up tournament last summer, won the national "Best of the Rest" Top Gun Division championship.

The team, consisting of Scott Abels, Wade Behlen and Jason Williams, defeated a team from Los Angeles at the national finals in Honolulu Oct. 28.

Abels played at Papillion-La Vista High School and Kearney State College while Behlen played at Columbus Lakeview and Kearney State. Williams played at Millard South and Mount Marty (S.D.) College. NSM

Airport X-Ray Machine Transforms Heisman

When Ohio State tailback Eddie George had his Heisman Trophy damaged while going through an airport X-ray machine on the return trip from New York, the incident drew national attention.

Now from the Internet comes this story from John Briganti (briganti@netcom.com):

"What most reports did not mention is that something even more strange happened. When the trophy came out of the X-ray machine, not only was the extended arm damaged, but the arm carrying the ball was bent out so that the trophy appeared to be pitching out, and a number 15 had been scratched onto the statue's back." NSM

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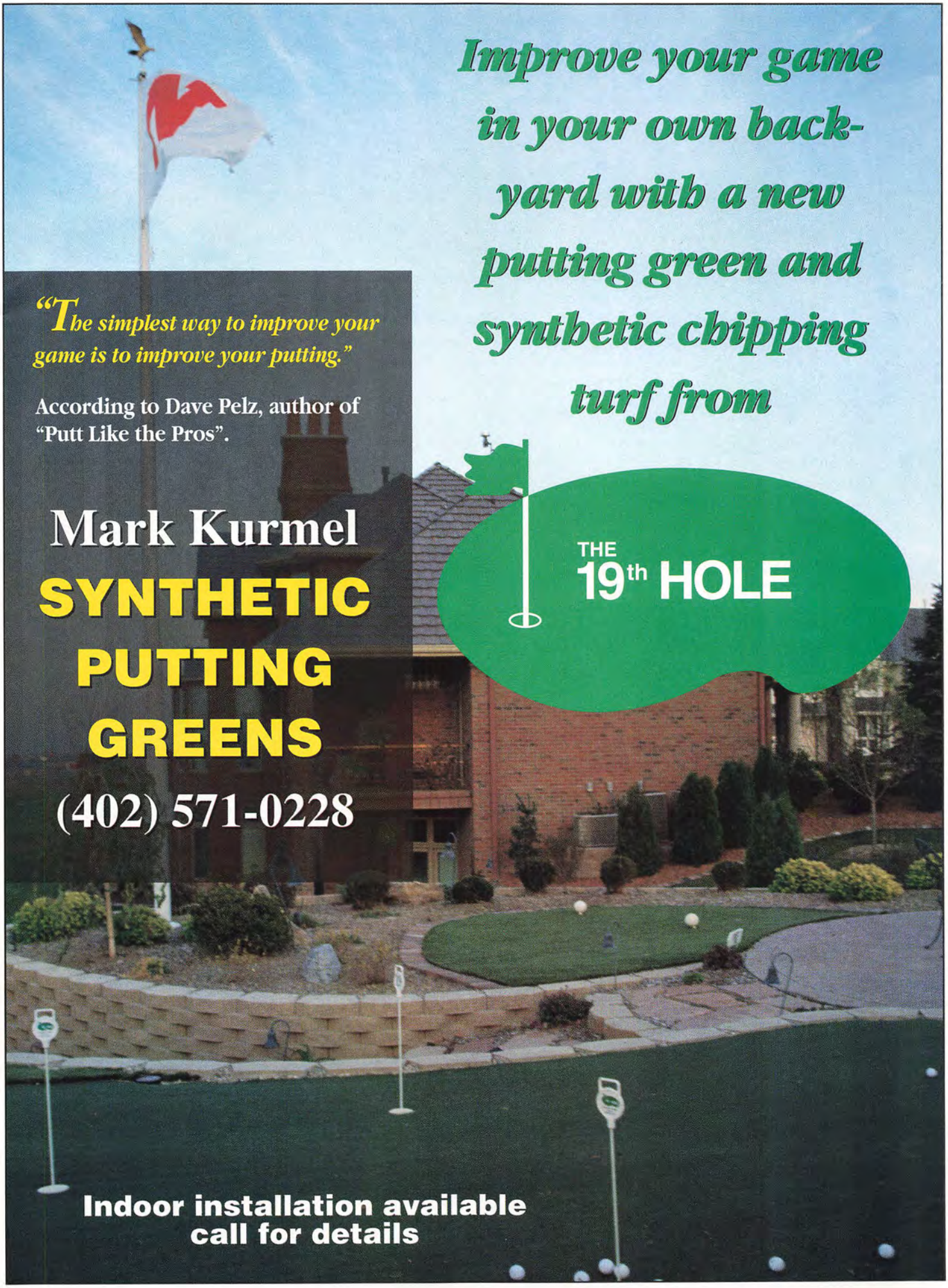
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A Menu Full of Leftovers

Leftovers — that's what you're in for. So, if you're not into rear-view mirrors, stop now and turn the page. Frankly, I always did best when the professor said, "Let's review."

The votes are in and I still say Turner Gill is the best quarterback Nebraska has ever had. He gets the nod over Tommie Terrific by the length of the football. Gill's unique blend of smarts, likability, passing touch, option instincts and leadership make him No. 1 here. Frazier has more rings, but he didn't have a defensive backfield full of walk-ons trying to stop a pass-happy Florida team out of the antique "52" defense. Had Nebraska been in this scheme defensively with these athletes back from 1981-83, Gills' troops would have lost none.

Some say a head coach wears out his welcome in his 10th season. No championships in 10 years? Get rid of him. If you are a subscriber to this, then you're figuring Danny Nee must take his Huskers deep into the NCAA this spring or take out a "Situations Wanted" ad. Hold it, Sparticus! The Sports Center is ready for that, no doubt; but consider in 10 years, Nee's program has brought in most of the best Nebraska kids, signed just a handful of Proposition 48 casualties, graduated most everybody and still stayed competitive in the most dangerous league in the land. Sure, losing the Curtis Marshalls, T.J. Pughs and players lost to football are pimples on NU's nose, but Dr. Oz has no regrets about stealing footballers from every other backyard. Ready to lose DeAngelo Evans back to Kansas or Grant Wistrom back to Missouri?

One thing, though, Danny: Please get with Bill Byrne and Nick Joos and start moving the Huskers toward real, live competition for the nonconference schedule. The fans are aware you might not win them all, but basketball is for entertainment around here. The marriage between you and Nebraska is way past the honeymoon stage. It's a good fit. It could handle a couple of losses so long as the losses come to teams we don't need an atlas to find.

The up-and-coming program in college basketball is Mississippi State. Scratch the up-and-coming part. The 'dogs are already there. Ten years into it (haven't we heard this before?), Coach Richard Williams may make the Final Four this season.

Give Angela Beck, Nebraska's women's basketball coach, her due. For years, she tuned out the third-row athletic directors and bypassed mediocre in-state talent, fully aware they couldn't cut it against major college opponents. Doesn't mean it'll stay that way forever. Forever is now. Her incoming freshmen class next year may be the nation's biggest secret, led by Gering's Brooke Schwartz.

Ah, the good ole days — where art thou? In football, from 1980-84, these very Huskers played Iowa three times, Florida State twice, Penn State four times, Auburn twice — even Syracuse and UCLA. In 1982, somehow, Iowa, Penn State and Auburn even got on the schedule at the same time. In 1986, we played Florida State, Illinois, Oregon and South Carolina before the Big Eight and a year later it was UCLA, Arizona State and South Carolina in the nonconference. The point is, those days don't have to be for the history books. Nebraskans, write to Mr. Byrne and tell him you'll pay more to see the great ones because you can't stomach the cupcakes no longer. I promise, the big boys will come here if we go there. That may mean one fewer home game one season, but haven't you seen enough of the Pacific from the South Stadium?

Got some notes for all you fans of CBS News' "48 Hours." It would take them at least that long to chronicle all of the "Longest Yards" in college football this year. At last check, Lawrence Phillips and Riley Washington were just two of 22 cases of law violations by players this season. Betcha didn't know that a Tennessee Volunteer was charged with rape and sodomy or a Florida Gator is guilty of throwing his wife around their apartment or that a Florida State Seminole is up on two counts of battery or that a Maryland Terrapin was suspended for gambling? Somehow "48 Hours" wasn't enough for all of that. Moral of the story: Wins aren't the result of bad people any more than choir boys always lose.

Update on Nebraska's own version of Roy Hobbs (for non-fans of "The Natural," he was the big guy in the movie). Darin Erstad was voted the Angels' top prospect in fall camp. They're talking that he may start 1996 in Triple A — just a fly ball away from the majors.

And, finally: a prediction. With this golden three-year run of Husker football perhaps coming to a close, it's high time some of those assistants prove what Dr. Tom has been saying for a generation: He has the best staff in the land. I believe Solich, Samuel, Brown and Gill are head coach material. Time to prove it. Fellas, cast your line out there and see what comes back. We know it's a great deal here. But, just because you leave the mother ship for a while doesn't mean you're not welcome back. If and when Dr. Oz gives it up, it'll be so much sweeter to get a head coach who also knows his way around the building. NSM

Jim Rose is the host of "SportsDay Mid-America with Jim Rose," a nightly radio call-in show.

By Gary Java

One Sports Guy's Wish List for 1996

As the newspaper guys advise, you write year-in-review columns in December and "wish list" columns in January.

So keeping in mind my editor gave me an early deadline for this story (pre-Fiesta Bowl) here's a wish list for '96, from an Omaha sports fan's perspective:

A Husker win on Jan. 2 out in the desert, and with it a second straight National Championship for Tom Osborne, his staff and his players, especially Tommie Frazier, who should then receive his lofty status as one of the greatest to ever play the college game.

At least a 24-hour euphoric moratorium on any fan mentioning "three-peat." OK, that's probably impossible. How about a 24-minute moratorium?

Twelve months of media focus on the "playing fields" in college athletics.

The media having no off-field problems or scandals to distract them from the games.

Peace on earth and good will toward men for Big 12 Commissioner Steve Hatchell

A strong injection of reality for officials of Texas, Texas A&M, Texas Tech and Baylor so they realize who bailed out whom in this Big 12 merger

Another strong recruiting class for the Huskers, including superstar option quarterback Odell James, from the Houston area. You should see some of this kid's high school game films.

Another strong recruiting class for Pat Behrns and his UNO football staff. Remember the Mavs redshirted 25 freshmen last season, many from across Nebraska, and had to get a medical redshirt for JUCO wide receiver MarTay Jenkins, the fastest player on an already fast team?

A second-place regular season finish for Danny Nee's talented Huskers in this last go-round for Big 8 hoops. Third place would look pretty good, too, but second place would mean Nee's guys laid it all out and pulled out a couple road upsets, without giving any back at home or at Colorado or Iowa State.

A "W" or two for the Huskers in the "Big Dance."

A .500 season for Dana Altman's Creighton Bluejays and a "W" or two in St. Louis at the Missouri Valley Conference Tournament, not necessarily for fans to notice the great progress being made on the "Hill" or to notice that Altman and his staff can flat-out coach and build a program, but it would be nice for the brain dead out there who only look at wins and losses when passing judgment. After all, this is a wish list, isn't it?

A "typical" spring for Creighton centerfielder Chad Meyers, an Omaha Gross kid. That's pretty much all he needs to be playing for the USA in the Atlanta Olympic Games this summer and about all he needs to get a nice pro contract out of this June's major league draft. What a great advertisement this kid is for college athletics.

A couple more Bluejays to have seasons to match Meyers' season. That would probably lead to Jack Dahm's Jays not just getting into an NCAA regional, but also getting into one with the potential to do some damage.

A center to emerge from spring practice that won't leave Milt Tenopir and Tom Osborne missing Aaron Graham too much.

A long-term agreement between major league baseball owners and the players' union.

Forgiveness from baseball fans if and when there is a settlement.

Plans for a 20,000-seat (or more) sports facility and a convention center in Omaha. For those of you reading this outside the Omaha area, ask your local politicians how much tax money in this state comes from the Douglas and Sarpy counties.

Secession from the state for the Omaha metro area if the rest of our state leaders fail to realize how important Omaha-area tax dollars from increased convention and sports activity can be for the entire state.

A Heisman for Ahman or "LP," depending, of course, on who is the Huskers' featured I-back this fall

Another Dallas-Buffalo Super Bowl. Sorry, that's a selfish, personal choice, but it's my wish list, isn't it?

Gary Java is the host of KKAR "Sports Talk," a nightly radio call-in show and "Sportsline with Gary Java," a weekly cable television show.

HIS OWN

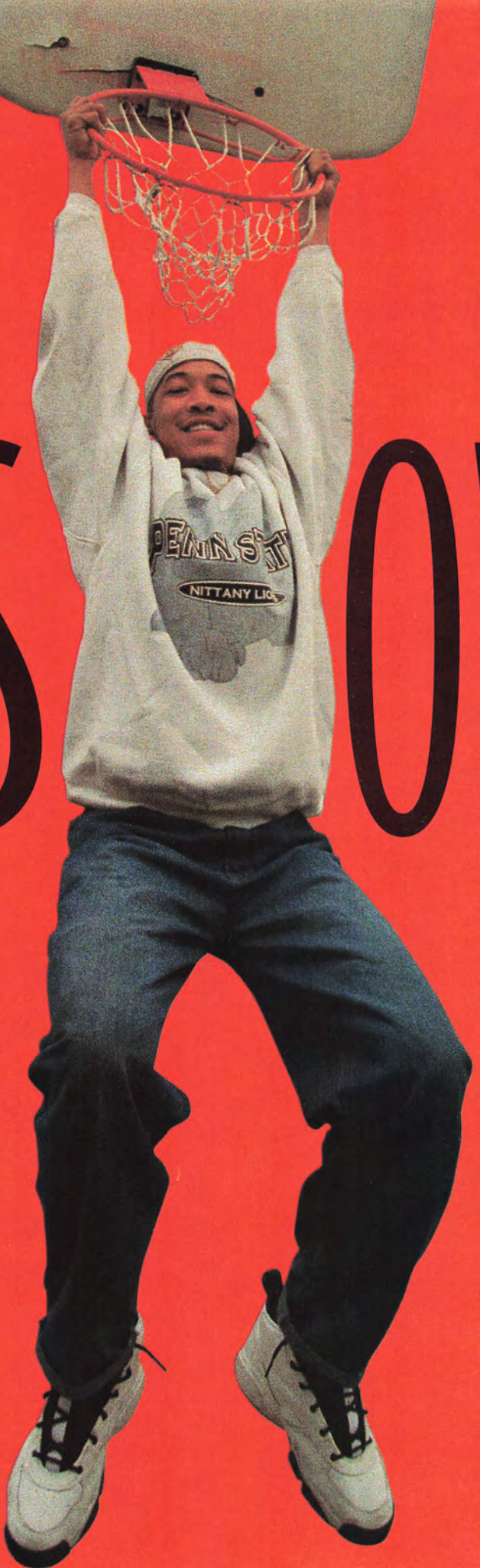


Photo by Bob Berry

The son of a basketball legend, Jaron Boone says he plays the game for all the right reasons.

MAN

By Ann Shrewsbury

Just imagine the pressure he felt — the son of a professional basketball player. Picture the father, dragging the young boy to the basketball court against his will, determined to make his son a star like he was. Picture the horror story in detail.

But Jaron Boone can say nothing about it. Despite possible preconceptions of what he might have felt growing up in the shadow of his father, Ron Boone, the younger Boone never felt any pressure. He said there were no demands.

Basketball may have been in his genes, but it wasn't in the minds of his parents when he was born. In fact, he practically fell into the game by mistake.

"Jaron was five when a friend of mine suggested I take him to the YMCA to play," said his mother, Jackie. "You had to be seven to play basketball, so we had to tell a little white lie."

The boy already was taller than most kids his age and looked older than five. So the mother and son went to the YMCA in Omaha to register for the league.

Boone has been hanging around basketball courts for most of his 21 years.

"(Former NBA great) Adrian Dantley told me something that I always kept in the back of my mind. He said, 'Life is a game, play it.' And that's what I've always done."

– Jaron Boone

"We got up to the table and they asked me how old Jaron was," his mother said. "I looked down at him and said, 'How old are you, Jaron?' He looked up at me and said, "I'm seven, mom.'"

"I could barely keep from laughing, but they let him in," she said.

From that day on, the youngster had a basketball in his hand and a spring in his step.

Each year, mother and son would walk into the Y and hold back their giggles while fibbing about the boy's age. Each year, they let him play.

But by the time he was ready for junior high, his age had caught up with his body and their cover was blown. His mother said she finally admitted her wrongdoing, but no one seemed to care.

Boone was going to play basketball. Not because his father did. Not because his mother wanted him to.

He was going to play because it was fun.

"(Former NBA great) Adrian Dantley told me something that I always kept in the back of my mind," Boone said. "He said, 'Life is a game, play it.' And that's what I've always done."

For Boone, now a senior at Nebraska who leads his team averaging 18.7 points a game, basketball has been something he's stuck with simply because he enjoys it. That's all.

"We never really thought about him playing basketball one way or the other," his mother said. "It was never a focus in our house. It was just something to keep him busy."

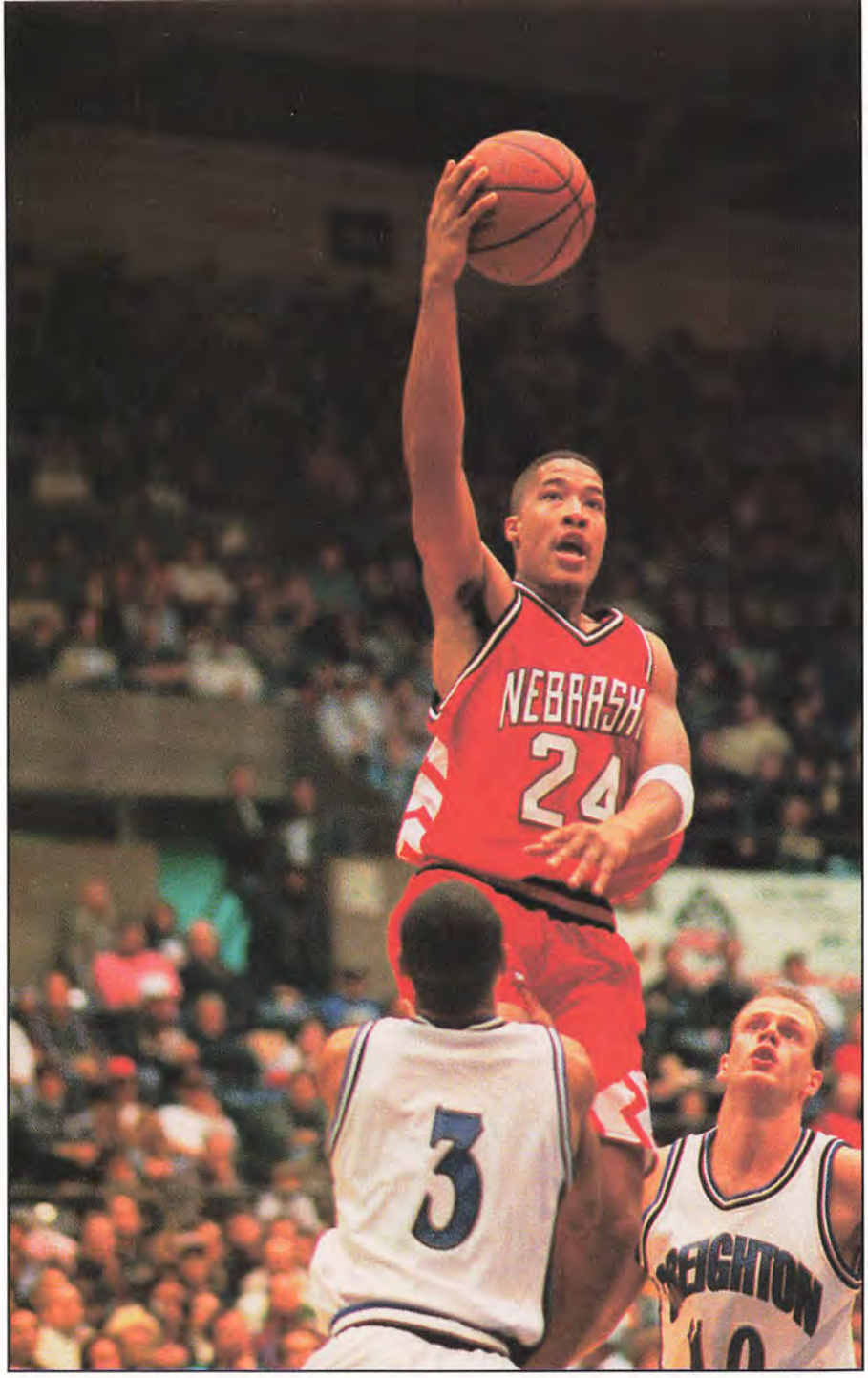


Photo by Eric Francis

Boone played superbly in his return to Omaha against Creighton University (above and opposite page) in December. He scored a game-high 20 points and dished out seven assists in an 88-67 win.

Basketball and baseball kept Boone busy throughout junior high and high school. And without much more than a vote of confidence from his dad, Boone became one of Utah's most highly acclaimed high school basketball players after moving there when he was 14.

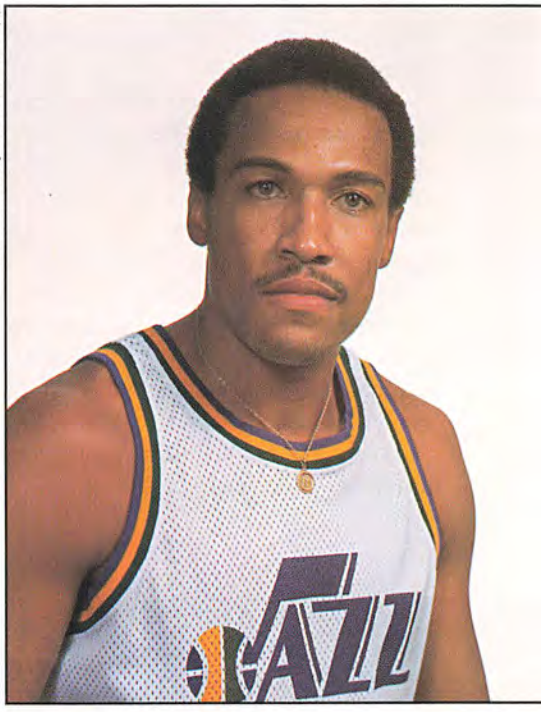
"Some fathers really work with their sons and coach them," his mother said. "But Ronnie didn't do this. He has suggested a couple things now and then, but we decided it was best for him not to be involved.

"We thought it might look like father following a son around to see if he lives up to (what dad did) and we didn't want that."

Besides, Boone was doing just fine on his own. He was taller than his 6-foot-2 father by his sophomore year of high school.

Named the 1992 USA Today Utah Player of the Year, Boone was the

Photos courtesy of the Utah Jazz (2)



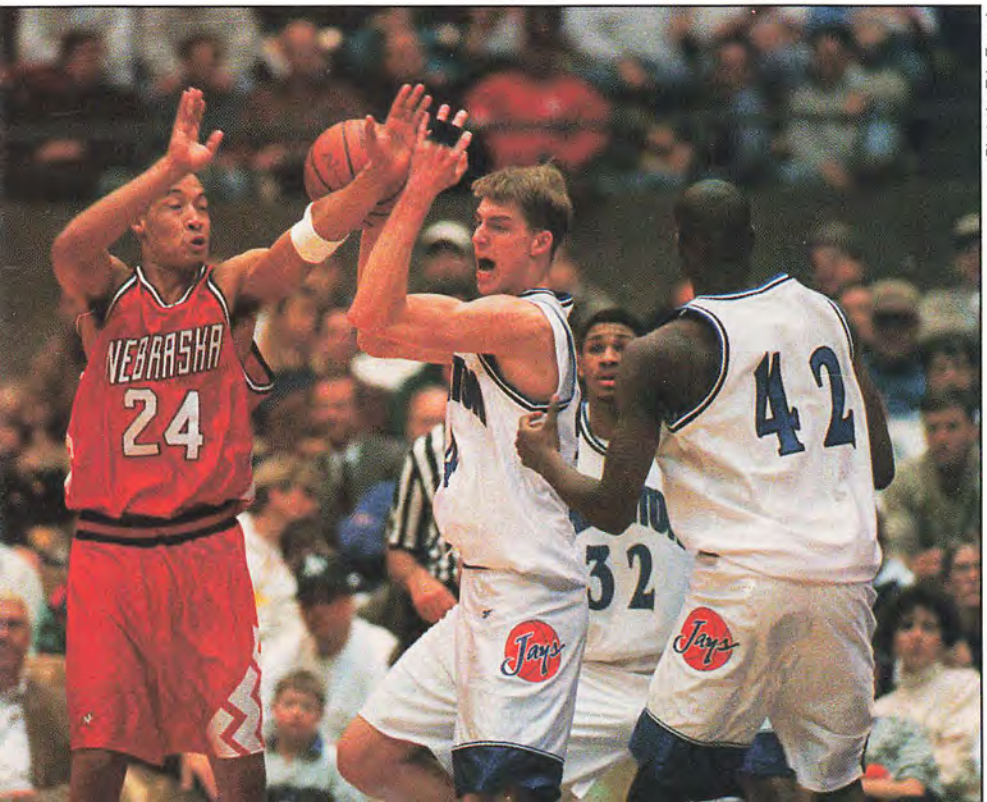


Photo by Eric Francis

Jaron's father, Ron, (above) closed out his 13-year professional career with a two-season stint with the Utah Jazz.

state's Class 4A Mr. Basketball and a first-team All-Utah selection at Skyline High School in Salt Lake City. College recruiters came calling.

Recruited by Utah, Colorado, Kansas and North Carolina, Boone decided to go to the state where his father grew up, and signed with Nebraska.

"We recruited him as Jaron Boone (not Ron Boone's son)," Nebraska Coach Danny Nee said. "He was a high-profile athlete and that's how we heard about him, not because of his dad."

"We made it clear to him early on that he was being recruited for his abilities and talents. Period."

Boone came into the program an already versatile player. He was able to step in at the point or two-guard position, and play a small forward when needed.

The past four years, Boone has developed physically in strength and stamina and polished his skills, his coach said.

A 1995-96 preseason first-team All-Big Eight selection, Boone is the second-highest scorer among Big Eight returnees, behind Oklahoma's Ryan Minor.

"He's got such good balance and he can do a lot of things for us," Nee said. "He can handle the ball, he can shoot, and he's playing good defense."

Boone was high scorer in seven of the Huskers' first nine games this season. He was a basket short of setting a new career high when he scored 30 points against Oregon.

Boone said he plans to graduate in May with a degree in human development and family, and hopes to be selected in the 1996 NBA draft.

"I don't ever approach the coaches and scouts and ask them about the chances," said Ron Boone, who is now a radio and television analyst for the Utah Jazz. "They approach me. I think he has a shot at making it. I like his poise and range and his shooting ability."

Nee said he expects nothing less than for Boone to be drafted.

"I'd say his chances are pretty good and I would expect that to happen," Nee said. "I'm going to do everything in my power to get him there."

And now, even though those around him expect him to go pro, the younger Boone said he still feels no pressure to accomplish what his father did as a professional athlete.

In fact, he'd rather accomplish what his father has done as a person.

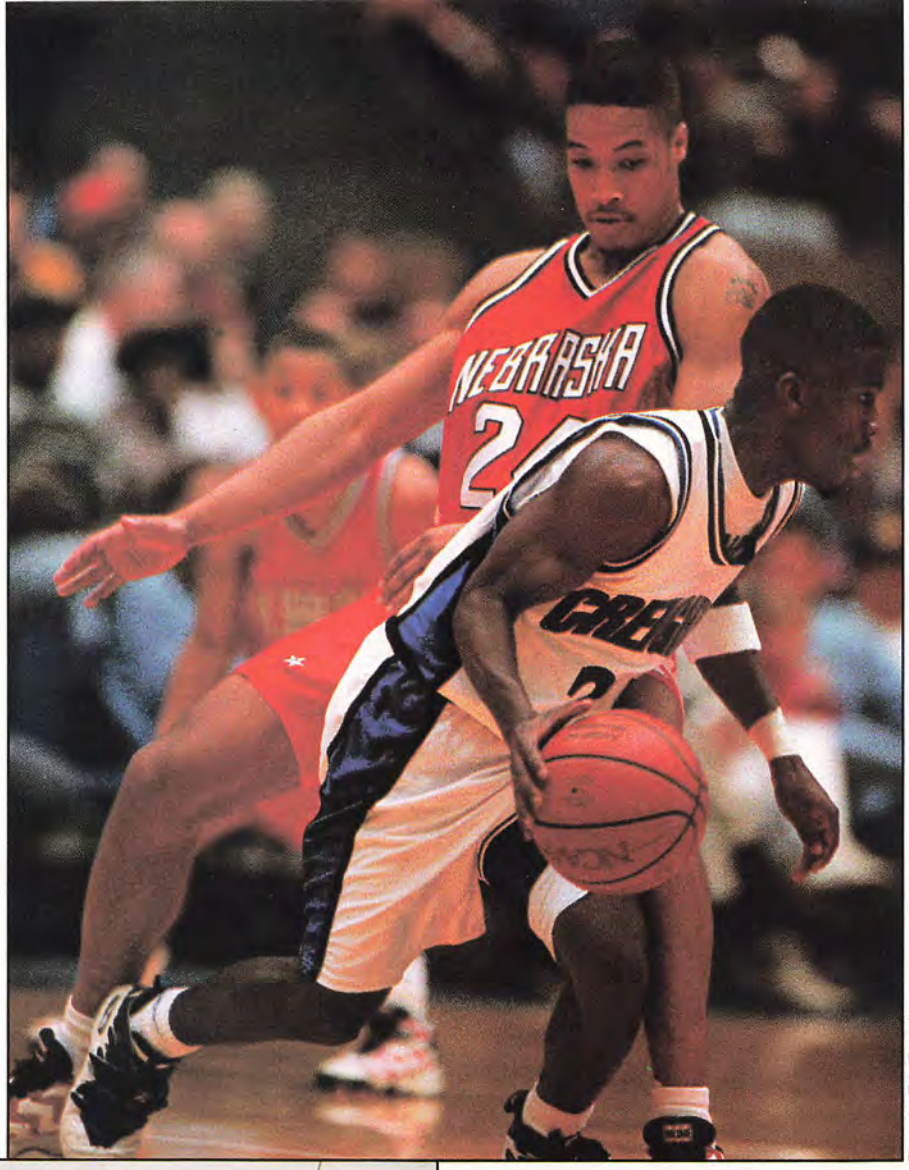
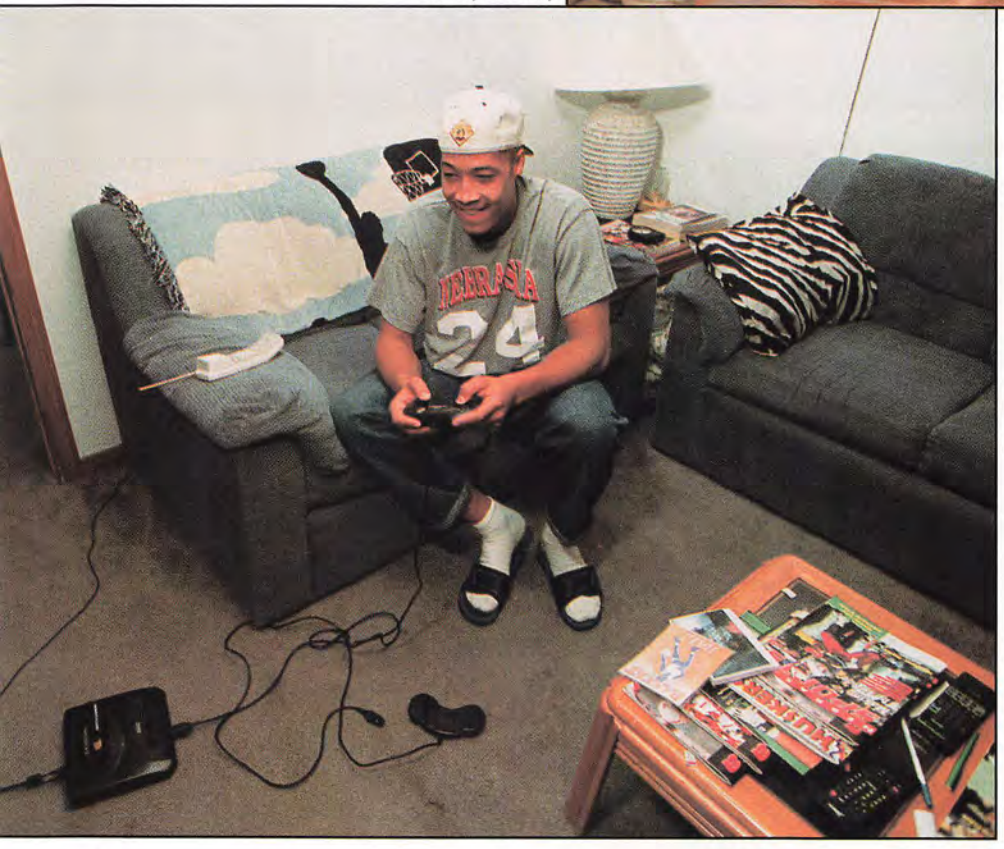


Photo by Eric Francis

Photo by Bob Berry

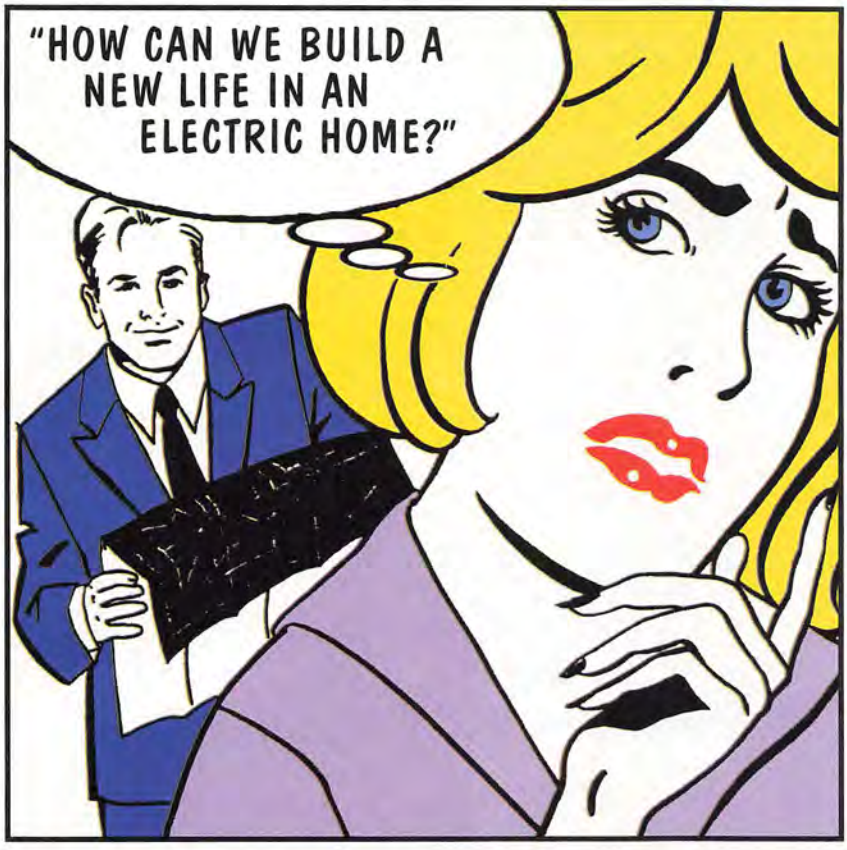


Whether he's on the court (above) or playing his favorite video game (left), Boone loves to take charge.

Born in Oklahoma City, Okla., Ron Boone's basketball career began at Tech High School in Omaha. He played at Iowa Western Community College and Idaho State before being drafted by the Phoenix Suns in the 11th round of the 1968 NBA Draft.

Selected by the Dallas Chaparrals in the American Basketball Association Draft, the elder Boone played eight years in the ABA and another five years in the NBA for the Kansas City Kings, Los Angeles Lakers and Utah Jazz.

He would go on to set a professional basketball record with 1,041 consecutive games played and was a member of the ABA All-Rookie team in 1969 and the ABA All-Star team in 1975.



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Ron Boone accomplished a lot on the court, but what's more important to the younger Boone is what his father has accomplished away from the basketball arena.

"People look at him and say (Ron Boone) is a great person," his son said. "He's a caring person and not someone who can be pushed over. He always stands up for what he believes in and people respect him for that. To me that makes him a good person and I'm trying to do the same things."

"He's always taught me to be respectful to others and treat people the way I would want to be treated. He always said you can't treat someone terrible and expect them to treat you like gold," he said.

Boone has tried to live up to those expectations.

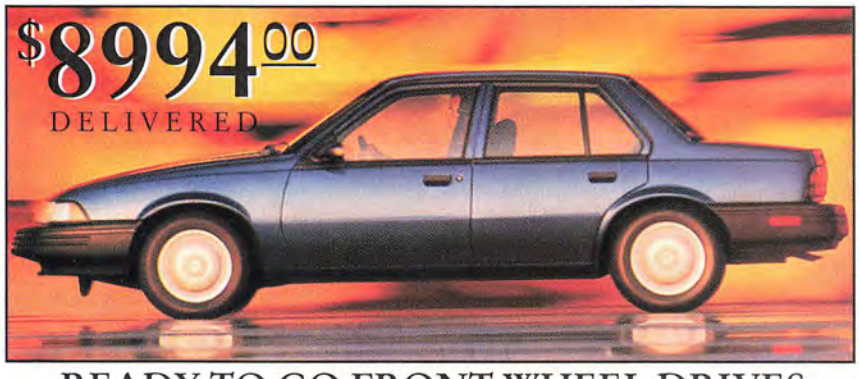
He lives with Nebraska football running back Clinton Childs and three others and does his best to make their house a happy home, Childs said.

"If he's ever in a bad mood, he never shows it," Childs said. "I'd say 95 percent of the time he's acting silly and just having fun." ■

Photo by Eric Francis

NEBRASKA HIGHLIGHTS

1994 CAVALIER 4 DOORS



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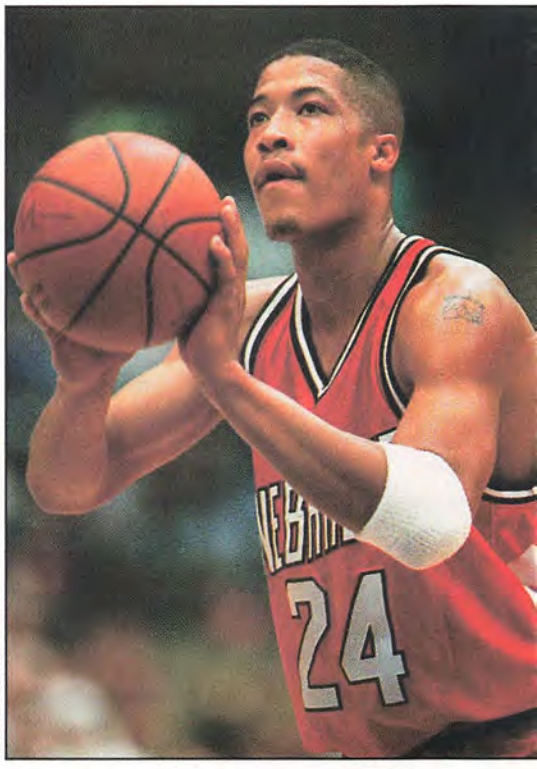

Photo by Eric Francis

Better known for his offense than his defense, Boone was the league's third-best scorer (20.8 points per game) last year behind Oklahoma's Ryan Minor and Iowa State's Fred Hoiberg.

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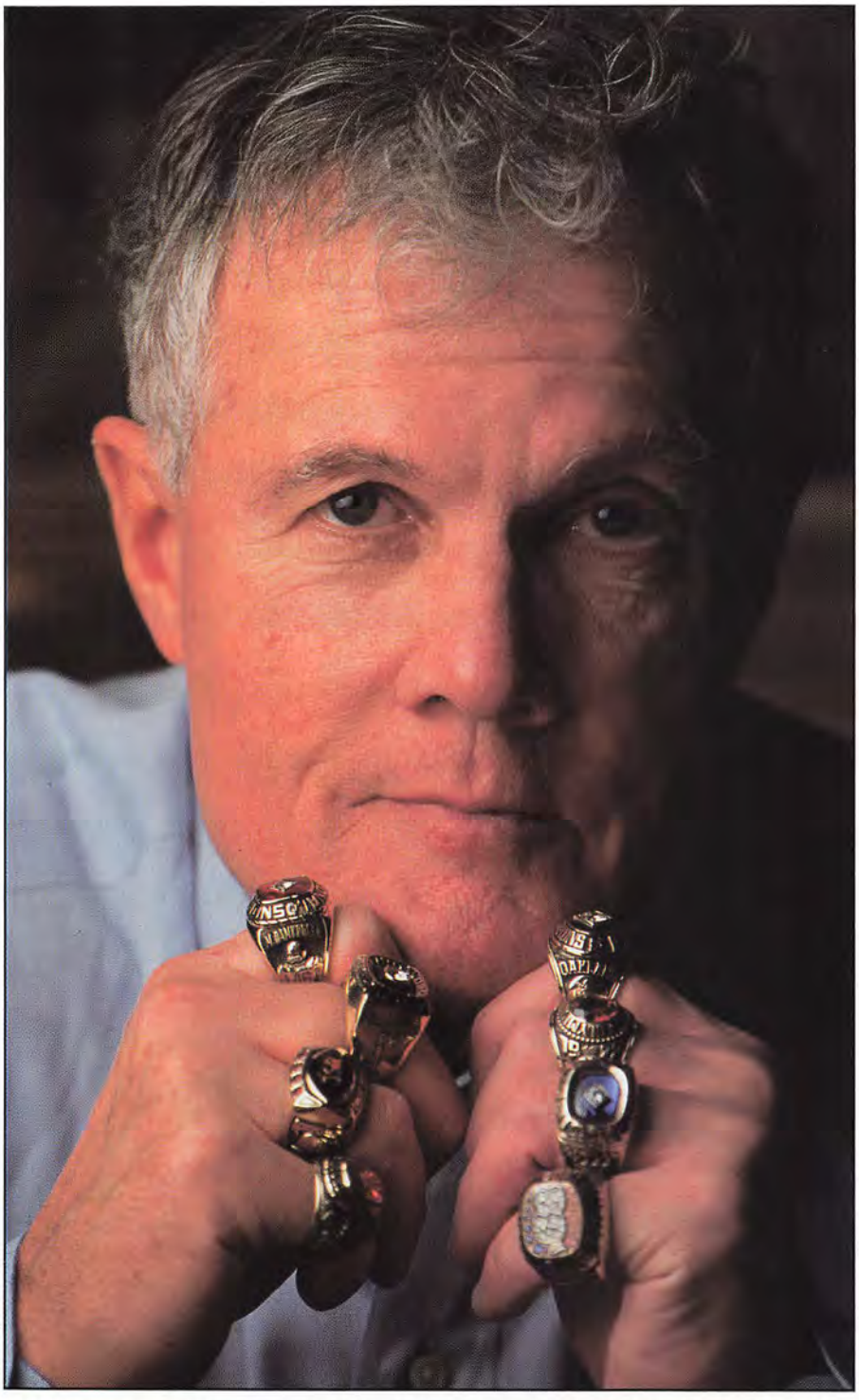
BY ANTHONY FLOTT

Defense Attorney William Gallup Is

Omaha's Ring Leader



Photos by Eric Francis

Gallup says payments are "here today and gone tomorrow" but the sports rings he has collected remain as mementos of past cases.

As one of Nebraska's more visible defense attorneys, William Gallup often comes into contact with clients of somewhat dubious distinctions. And though he may be clean as a whistle, many people consider him to be one of the state's biggest ring leaders.

A look at his hands tells you why.

Gallup, who operates Gallup & Associates out of his posh office in Omaha's Old Market district, has built an impressive collection of sports rings, running the gamut of collegiate and professional players. Accepted in lieu of legal fees, they often can be found on the fingers of their new owner.

It was a collection he had not planned on starting.

"I guess it started when I was representing someone, and I had said that I admired his ring," Gallup said. "He just said, `Well, here you go,' took it off, and gave it to me.

"A lot of these guys, unfortunately, don't have a lot of sentiment. Or maybe just at that time. Twenty years later they'll probably want them. A couple of these were even unsolicited. They have an intrinsic value and are a good conversation starter."

Gallup recalls an instance on an airplane when he was wearing Vida Blue's Oakland A's World Series Championship ring.

"A woman saw it and started talking to me," said Gallup, laughing. "She got excited and said, `Wait until I tell my dad I met Vida Blue.' I didn't have the heart to tell her who I really was."

Gallup's collection actually dates to a ring he received while playing baseball at the University of Omaha in the late 1950s. He graduated from the university in 1957 with a bachelor's degree in education, but continues to dabble in his favorite sport. Last year, he played second base in the All-America League for players 40-and-over.

The Omaha University ring is proudly displayed alongside other more notable ones. His collection, watched over by a pair of armored knights in his office, includes:

- University of Nebraska quarterback Dave Humm's 1971 national championship ring.
- A Pittsburgh Steelers Super Bowl ring.

"I guess it started when I was representing someone, and I had said that I admired his ring. He just said, 'Well, here you go,' took it off, and gave it to me."

— William Gallup

• Triple A championship rings from the Omaha Royals and Oklahoma 89ers.

• A 1970 Orange Bowl ring.

• Pete Rose's #14 World Series ring from 1975. He acquired the ring through a friend who worked at Balfour, one of the nation's largest ring manufacturers. Gallup said Charlie Hustle had returned the ring so he could have one made with different diamonds.

He also possesses rings from an Olympic boxer, a USC running back, and ex-Denver Bronco great Floyd Little. Most of the rings, he said, are worth about $500, but some could fetch several thousand dollars on the trading market.

Gallup's collection is unusual because of its rarity. While baseball, football and basketball cards, and other sports paraphernalia, are relatively easy to come by, rings are not.

"You can't just go and buy these at a store," Gallup said. "A lot of the time you can get them through estate sales. And there are a couple of businesses who collect Super Bowl rings. But you won't find them in stores.

"I don't know of anyone else who has a ring collection. For one thing, they're too expensive."

In addition to rings, Gallup also is an afficionado of medieval collections, as indicated by the two knights in his office. He also acquires badges from police officers whom he has defended.

"It's just a little memento from each case," he says. "Payments are here today and gone tomorrow, but these things stay around."

Gallup's collection includes (from top) World Series rings from Pete Rose and Vida Blue, Dave Humm's 1971 national championship ring, and Joe Greene's 1975 Super Bowl ring.

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Organizers of the first Cornhusker State Winter Games are banking on the success of its summer counterpart.

LET IT SNOW LET IT SNOW LET IT SNOW

by Kevin Warneke

LaVerne Kelsay's racing calendar no longer has an opening for the second weekend in February. Kelsay, 58, said he, his wife, Jeanie, 54, and their two grandchildren, Brandon and Kirstin Graalfs, ages 13 and 11, will spend a portion of that weekend running through the neighborhoods near Ak-Sar-Ben.

Kelsay said he and his racing family need little encouragement to go running and the inaugural Cornhusker State Winter Games in February will offer plenty of it.

"We run wherever we are," Kelsay said. "We're a family that's into fitness."

© '96 LUEBKE

Tom Ash, executive director of the Games, is banking on more families like the Kelsays to participate in the 1996 Cornhusker State Winter Games, which will be held Feb. 9-11 in the Omaha area.

"Families are the cornerstone of the state games," Ash said. "We sell fun. We discourage the killer mentality. Sportsmanship and fair play are high on our priority list.

"This is sports at its purest level."

Don't take Ash's words to mean that the competition won't be spirited. As in the summer edition of the Cornhusker State Games, organizers are careful to provide competitors with enough categories to appeal to participants of all ages and skill levels.

The point to this approach, Ash explained, is to remove any reason for participants to claim they're too young or too old, too inexperienced or too experienced to compete.

"Our goal is to get people off that couch," he said.

Plans for the first Cornhusker State Winter Games began in earnest about 18 months ago. State Games officials met with Omaha Mayor Hal Daub, Douglas County board chairman Clare Duda and Omaha Chamber of Commerce president Bob Bell. "We came away from that meeting with a great deal of enthusiasm," Ash said, not to mention support.

The city pledged financial backing and the support of its Parks and Recreation Department; the county pledged financial support and the chamber offered the expertise of some of its employees.

Ash explained that the summer version of the Cornhusker State Games in Lincoln served as a model for starting the winter edition — and a good one at that. The inaugural summer games in 1985 featured 19 events and drew 4,000 participants. Eleven years later, the summer games have grown to 44 events with 19,600 participants.

Those numbers are good enough to rank Nebraska in the top five among the 42 states with summer games.

Each year, the non-profit organization that runs the State Games has broke even financially — but just barely.

"We've been hanging on the edge of the cliff so long we're starting to enjoy the view," Ash said.

The winter games will start with humble beginnings similar to the summer games' start 11 years ago: 16 events and an expected 4,800 participants, said Dave Mlnarik, Winter Games coordinator.

"OUR GOAL IS TO GET PEOPLE OFF THE COUCH."

Tom Ash,
State Games
Executive Director

Organizers devised a slate of events that include traditional winter activities and some that are likely to attract a larger number of participants. Cross-country skiing, hockey, and figure skating fit into the first category; bowling, volleyball and indoor soccer fall into the latter.

They also threw some unusual events into the mix. One is platform tennis. Organizers expect 25 participants in that event. A doubles competition played on a court enclosed by 12-foot-high taut-wire screens, platform tennis combines elements of racquetball, squash and tennis, and applies most of the rules of tennis with some exceptions. One is that only one serve is allowed in doubles competition while another allows for shots to be hit off the screens surrounding the court after the ball hits in play — which enthusiasts say adds excitement to the competition.

Another unusual event is speed skating. With little history of the sport in the state and no true racing track, The Tranquility Ice-plex will have to do.

"Probably what we'll get is a lot of hockey players who want to go fast," Ash said.

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In order to present a full slate of activities, organizers had to cross the Missouri River into Iowa to offer alpine skiing events at the Mt. Crescent Ski Area. "It would seem inconsistent to have an event in Iowa and not to let Iowans compete," Ash said.

In exchange for the use of their facilities on the Iowa side of the Missouri River, the Games extended an invitation to residents of Pottawattamie, Mills and Harrison County residents to enter the normally Nebraska residents-only Games.

Kelsay said he'll gladly accept. "Most of our runs, we do over there," the Council Bluffs resident said.

While organizers plan to start slowly and build support and participation, they also have their sights set on matching Wisconsin's winter games competition, which drew 5,004 participants last year. That was tops among the half-dozen states that hold the cold-weather events.

"We don't intend to model our games after also-rans," Ash said. "We intend to be among the leaders."

Ash hopes, in time, that the winter games will draw participants from throughout the state. For the moment, however, he expects most competitors to come from the Omaha-Council Bluffs metropolitan area.

The Summer Games, at first, attracted participants mainly from the Lincoln area. Last year, 87 of Nebraska's 93 counties were represented.

"It'll take time to make this a statewide games," Ash said. "It's no different than the way we built the summer games."

Organizers expect the inaugural State Winter Games to cost about $200,000. That's roughly half the cost of the 1993-94 version of the Summer Games, which drew $201,000 in corporate sponsorship.

The Winter Games will be heavily underwritten by corporate sponsorship. A projected budget anticipates $140,000 of the $238,000 in anticipated income will come from sponsors. The Omaha World-Herald, with a $25,000 contribution, signed on as the title sponsor.

Mlnarik estimates the winter games will need 500 volunteers to operate. No problem, he said, because organizers have turned to event coordinators to rally their troops.

"People just come out of the woodwork," he said. "This is a great volunteering state. It's the heart and soul of this program."

ORGANIZERS HAVE THEIR SIGHTS SET ON MATCHING WISCONSIN'S WINTER GAMES COMPETITION, WHICH DREW 5,004 PARTICIPANTS LAST YEAR.

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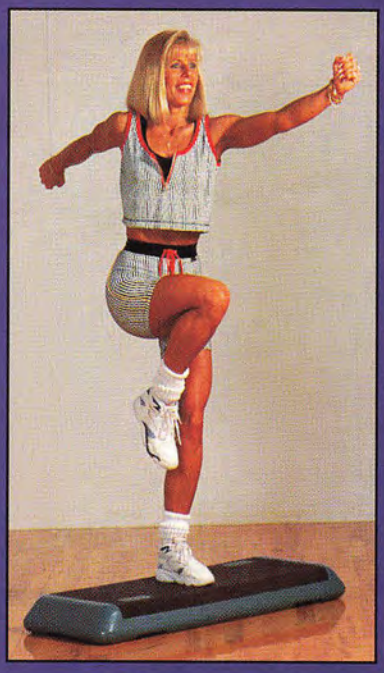

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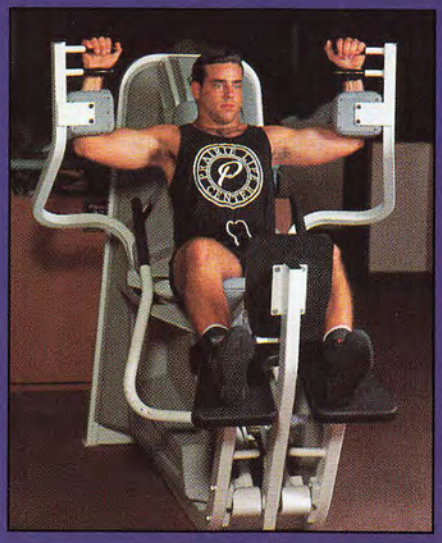

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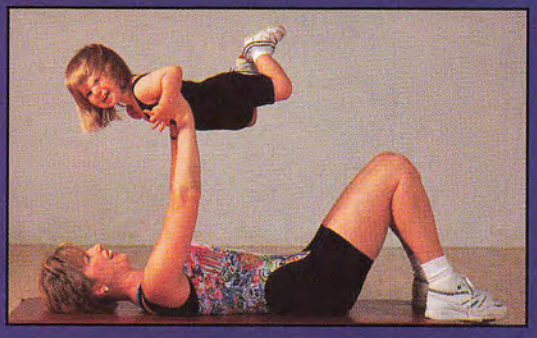

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Ash added that volunteers receive little more than thanks for their time. "Just a shirt and a lot of warm fuzzies."

If the competition isn't enough to attract participants, Ash said, the festival-like atmosphere during the weekend should. The games begin Friday, Feb. 9 with an opening ceremony on the ice at Ak-Sar-Ben Coliseum.

The ceremony will include indoor fireworks and a performance by members of the Omaha Figure Skating Club.

"It's our showpiece event," Ash said.

After competition is over Friday and Saturday nights, participants will return to Ak-Sar-Ben Coliseum. "During the day, everybody goes out and does their thing. Then they come back to the athletes' parties and share their war stories.

"Hey, we're all Nebraskans. We're all Iowans. The camaraderie is really special." ■

A COMPETITOR'S GUIDE TO THE GAMES

ALPINE EVENTS
Mount Crescent Ski Area, Crescent, Iowa

BADMINTON
Frady Fitness Center, Offutt Air Force Base, Bellevue

BOWLING
Kelley's North Bowl, Omaha

CROSS-COUNTRY SKIING
Mahoney State Park, Ashland

CURLING
Ak-Sar-Ben Curling Club, Omaha

FIGURE SKATING
Hitchcock Park Ice Area, Omaha

HOCKEY
Ak-Sar-Ben Coliseum,
Tranquility Ice-plex, Omaha

MALLWALK
Oak View Mall, Omaha

PLATFORM TENNIS
Kupka Court, Omaha

ROAD RACE
Ak-Sar-Ben area

INDOOR SOCCER
Kiewit Fitness Center, Creighton University, Omaha
Offutt Fieldhouse

SPEED SKATING
Tranquility Ice-plex

TENNIS
Hanscom Brandeis Indoor Tennis Center, Omaha

VOLKSSKATE
Ak-Sar-Ben Coliseum

VOLKSWALK
Ak-Sar-Ben area

VOLLEYBALL
NU at Omaha Fieldhouse
Mockingbird Hills Recreation Center, Omaha
Benson Community Center, Omaha
Camelot Community Center, Omaha
Columbus Park, Omaha
Offutt Fieldhouse

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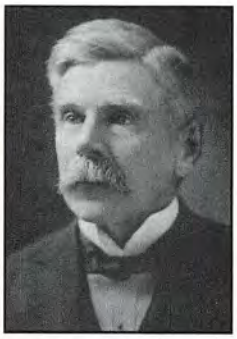
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LINCOLN SOUTHEAST

Having arrived in Lincoln two years ago from Indiana — the hotbed of hoops — there was some question as to whether football-basketball star J.R. Edwards would pursue his collegiate athletic career on the hardwood or the gridiron.

The answer came in mid-December when the two-time, all-state wide receiver verbally committed to play football for the University of Nebraska next season. The 6-foot-2, 180-pound senior accepted Coach Tom Osborne's scholarship offer seven days after his recruiting visit to the school. He will sign his letter of intent Feb. 7.

Edwards came to Lincoln Southeast in the fall of 1994 after spending his first two years of high school playing football and basketball in the small southwest Indiana town of Princeton, a school of about 300 students. When his mother, Janet, married Dennis Banks, the family of three girls and two boys moved to Lincoln.

Despite the transfer to a school nearly six times larger than his old one, Edwards and his electronically timed 4.7 second speed in the 40 made an immediate impact on the Knights' football and basketball programs.

"He's a very talented athlete," Southeast football Coach Chuck Mizerski said. "We're very fortunate he came to our school."

Edwards said he wasn't sure which direction his athletic career would head after the transfer.

"I was a little apprehensive about coming to Nebraska and being able to play both sports," Edwards said last year. "Since football is so much bigger here in Nebraska I didn't think my chances of being recruited for basketball were very good."

But Mizerski, who has coached at the school for 17 years, was convinced of Edwards' ability from the first day he saw him.

"Physically, he has the whole package," Mizerski said. "He's definitely a Division I athlete."

The Knights finished 7-2 in Edwards' junior year and just missed qualifying for the playoffs. This season, with Edwards catching 54 passes (one shy of the single-season Class A state record) for 814 yards, the Knights went 6-4, losing in the first round of the playoffs to eventual state champion Millard South, 27-7. Those accomplishments drew scholarship enticements from Nebraska, Missouri, Iowa State, Colorado State and Wyoming.

Edwards, who said he has met his academic requirements, could make an immediate impact at Nebraska. He is expected to compete for the No. 1 receivers job with another Nebraska native, senior Brendan Holbein, and sophomore Kenny Cheatham.

Wearing the Knights' black and gold on the basketball court, Edwards drew the attention of college basketball scouts with his play at the guard spot. After averaging 16.5 points a game last year, several Division I schools expressed interest, including Oklahoma, Syracuse and Villanova. This year, he led Southeast to wins in four of its first five games.

Before he ends his high school playing days, Edwards hopes to add a state championship medal to his collection of achievements.

"That way I can end my basketball career and get on with football," he said. NSM

Photo by Bob Berry

An all-stater in basketball and football the last two years at Lincoln Southeast High School, Edwards will concentrate solely on football at the University of Nebraska this fall.

Signing with the Huskers

Edwards is one of eight high school football players who say they will accept a scholarship from Nebraska. Here are the others:

Name	Position	High School
John Gibson	Wide receiver	Papillion-La Vista
Sasho Becvarovski	Lineman	St. John (Indiana) Lake Central
Loran Kaiser	Fullback	St. Paul
Willie Miller	Fullback	Bellevue West
Russ Hochstein	Lineman	Hartington Cedar Catholic
David Webber	Lineman	St. Louis Hazelwood East
DeAngelo Evans	Running back	Wichita (Kan.) Collegiate

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The Huskers' Fiesta Bowl rout brought both excitement and a sigh of relief for Nebraska fans who expected nothing less than a successful defense of the national title the Huskers had worked so hard to earn in 1994 and ultimately retained so easily in 1995.

By Sean Weide

Barely 15 minutes had ticked off the clock at the 30th battle between college football's No. 1 and No. 2 teams and already the Tostitos Fiesta Bowl had begun to look more like a typical Nebraska outing on a September afternoon against a Pacific or New Mexico State than a showdown with an unbeaten, Steve Spurrier-coached Florida team.

Even the most faithful Nebraska football fan could not have anticipated the ease with which the Huskers handled the Gators during a 62-24 win in Tempe, Ariz.

Not since the 1971 Nebraska team shelled Alabama in the 1972 Orange Bowl 38-6, had a No. 1 handled a No. 2 so easily. Ten school records for performances in a bowl game were established including rushing, total offense, points scored and total touchdowns. Florida's minus 28 yards rushing was the worst ever by a Husker bowl opponent. Quarterback Tommie Frazier had

The Huskers' defense had Florida quarterback Danny Wuerffel and Nebraska's second national title wrapped up before halftime. Photo by Bob Berry

Gators
43
wamped!

the best rushing day of his Husker career with 199 yards. And the Husker defense — which had cost Nebraska shots at national titles in previous years — put on one of its all-time greatest performances.

Who could have foreseen the circumstances that earned Nebraska its first back-to-back national championships since the 1970 and 1971 seasons?

Tommie Frazier rushing for a career-high 199 yards.

Frazier was probably not the most popular player on the Nebraska football team during his career, but he certainly was the most respected.

The soft-spoken Floridian was one of the successful and most versatile athletes to ever play college football. But there was some question as to whether Frazier could transfer his skills into a professional football career.

The last Husker quarterback to be taken in the NFL draft was Keithen McCant, a 12th round pick of the Cleveland Browns in 1992 whose Husker career was far from prolific. Days before his final collegiate game, Frazier told reporters that "the NFL isn't everything," and that if a career in professional football didn't work out he always had his degree in communication to fall back upon.

But the Huskers' soft-spoken leader had something to prove to the NFL scouts, to himself, and even to the Heisman Trophy voters who voted him second behind winner Eddie George of Ohio State.

He stamped his second career bowl win over a team from his native state with a two-touchdown, career-best 199-yard rushing performance that included a Fiesta Bowl record 75-yard run. He was named the Most Valuable Player for the third straight time in a bowl game.

"People should take their Heisman Trophy votes back and do it over," said Husker defensive tackle Christian Peter. "Without a doubt, Tommie Frazier is the best player in college football."

Christian Peter returning a fumble 95 yards for an apparent two-point defensive score on an extra-point.

The 300-pound defensive lineman rumbled down the field after scooping up a fumble and high-stepped into the end zone. Who cares if it was called back?

"For crying out loud, I go 90 yards and they call it back," Peter said. "I about had a heart attack on the 10."

Just 48 hours earlier, Peter was sprinting full speed into the open field and running under a pass thrown from — not Frazier but Husker line coach Milt Tenopir. Was it a new wrinkle in the Huskers' offense?

"Hit him in the hands coach," yelled Christian's younger brother, Jason.

Peter, who played just nine games of high school football before coming to Nebraska, couldn't draw in Tenopir's lofty spiral and the football bounded along the ground.

"That's why we're playing defense," Jason said, wearing an ear-to-ear grin.

The Huskers playing a bowl game with a virtual home field advantage

The caravan of team buses carrying the Nebraska players and coaching staff slowly made its way past a half dozen rows of corporate tents. Led by a flotilla of police motorcycles, the buses

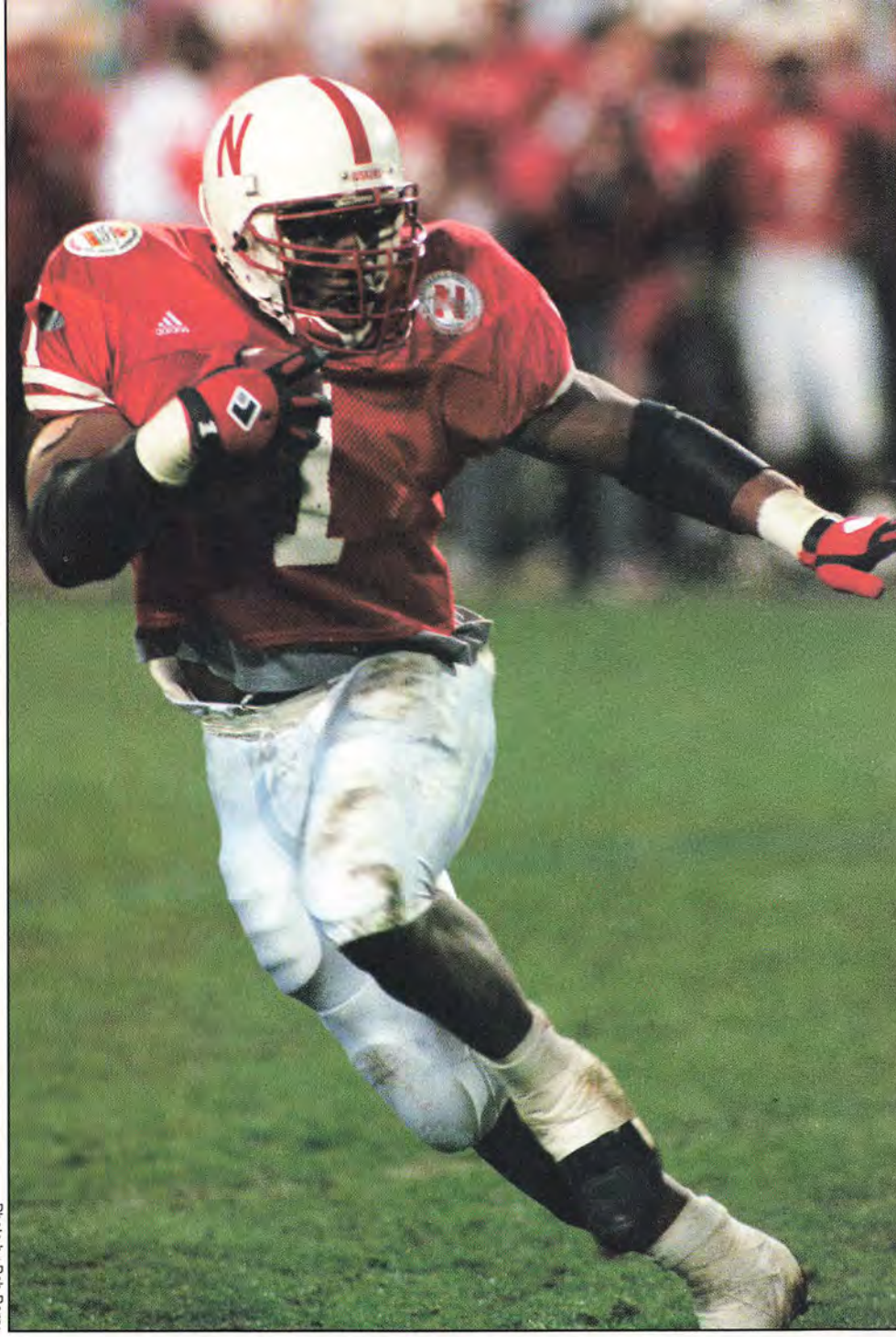

Photo by Bob Berry

Running back Lawrence Phillips returned to the Heisman form he displayed before being suspended for six games.

The Look of a Winner

Tommie Frazier secures his place among Husker quarterback greats.

Tommie Frazier's success at Nebraska surprised no one. He was the quarterback everyone expected him to be. The publicity surrounding his recruitment four years ago was justified. In his case, it was much ado about something.

Frazier's announcement that he would become a Husker was among the few bright spots in the early months of 1992. Nebraska had just lost to Miami 22-0 in the Orange Bowl. Sophomore tight end Johnny Mitchell had declared himself eligible for the National Football League draft. And Osborne had to deal with events surrounding running back Scott Baldwin.

Recruiting analysts were predicting that Frazier would pick Clemson or Notre Dame. Colorado had also been high on Frazier's list. He was among three quarterbacks the Buffaloes tried to recruit. The others were Chad Davis from California and Koy Detmer from Texas.

As often is the case, the recruiting analysts were wrong. Frazier cast his lot with the Huskers, in a recruiting class that included another quarterback — Ben Rutz, from Oklahoma City. Davis went to Oklahoma then transferred to Washington State. Detmer picked Colorado.

Frazier and Rutz joined five other quarterbacks at Nebraska: Mike Grant, Tony Veland and Brook Berringer, as well as walk-ons Joel Cornwell and Jon McMillen. The Huskers' pre-fall depth chart showed Grant and Veland sharing No. 1, followed by Cornwell. Grant and Cornwell were seniors. Veland was a redshirt freshman, as was Berringer.

Grant had the starting job to himself after Veland broke his collarbone during a scrimmage less than two weeks before the season-opener against Utah at Memorial Stadium. Grant, Frazier, Cornwell and Berringer all played in the 49-22 victory. Frazier gained 14 yards on two carries and threw his first pass as a Husker. It fell incomplete.

Frazier scored his first touchdown on a 3-yard run early in the fourth quarter, in a 48-7 victory against Middle Tennessee State the next week. And he completed 2 of 5 passes for 23 yards.

Statistically, his start was inauspicious. But he was a true freshman. And that was significant. Frazier didn't play in the next two games — a 29-14 loss at Washington and a 45-24 victory against Arizona State in Lincoln. Grant went the distance in both, then started the Big Eight-opening, 55-0 victory against Oklahoma State at Memorial Stadium. As was the case in the Middle Tennessee State game, Frazier, Cornwell, Berringer and McMillen all took snaps against the Cowboys. Grant and Frazier each threw two touchdown passes, and Frazier rushed for 38 yards on six carries.

Two weeks later, after a Saturday off, Frazier got his first start. The Huskers, who had moved into the Associated Top 10 (at No. 8) played Missouri, in Columbia. The date, Oct. 24, 1992, is historically important. It was the first time a true freshman started at quarterback for an Osborne-coached team.

Frazier led the Huskers to back-to-back national championships. He broke the Big Eight record for victories by a starting quarterback: 33 — held previously by Oklahoma's Steve Davis with 32. During his last three seasons, Nebraska won an NCAA Division IA-record 36 games. Frazier established a school record for total offense with over 5,600 yards. He was responsible for a Husker career record number of touchdowns: 38 rushing and 44 passing. His 44 touchdown passes are the most by any Nebraska quarterback, including David Humm and Jerry Tagge, the only ones who passed for more yards than Frazier during their careers. Frazier rushed for 2,154 yards, the most ever by a Husker quarterback. He earned Most Valuable Player honors in Nebraska's bowl games three times and rushed for nearly 200 yards in his final time as a Husker.

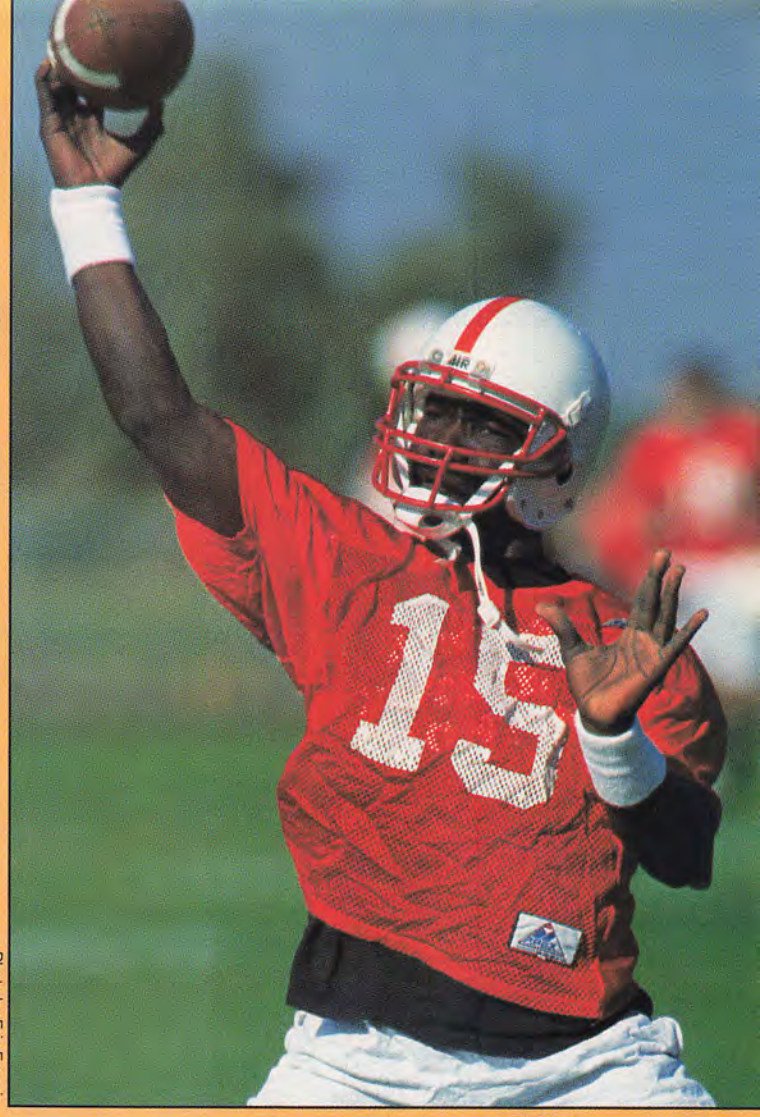

Photo by Eric Francis

Frazier and his bevy of career records will remain as the measuring stick by which all future Husker signal callers are judged against.

Nebraska hasn't lost a regular-season game since Frazier was a freshman. The Huskers played for the national championship in three consecutive bowl games and won it twice. Their winning streak currently stands at 25 games.

Osborne, not given to exaggeration, acknowledged Frazier's value to Nebraska. "I don't want to give the impression this is a one-man program in the last four years because we went through a seven-game stretch last year without him and still won some very tough games," Osborne said. "But I would say if I were to choose one player who has had the most impact on the outcome of the greatest number of games over the longest period of time since I've been at Nebraska, it would be Tommie Frazier."

That's what people expected when Frazier arrived. That such expectations are rarely realized makes his story all the more remarkable. ■

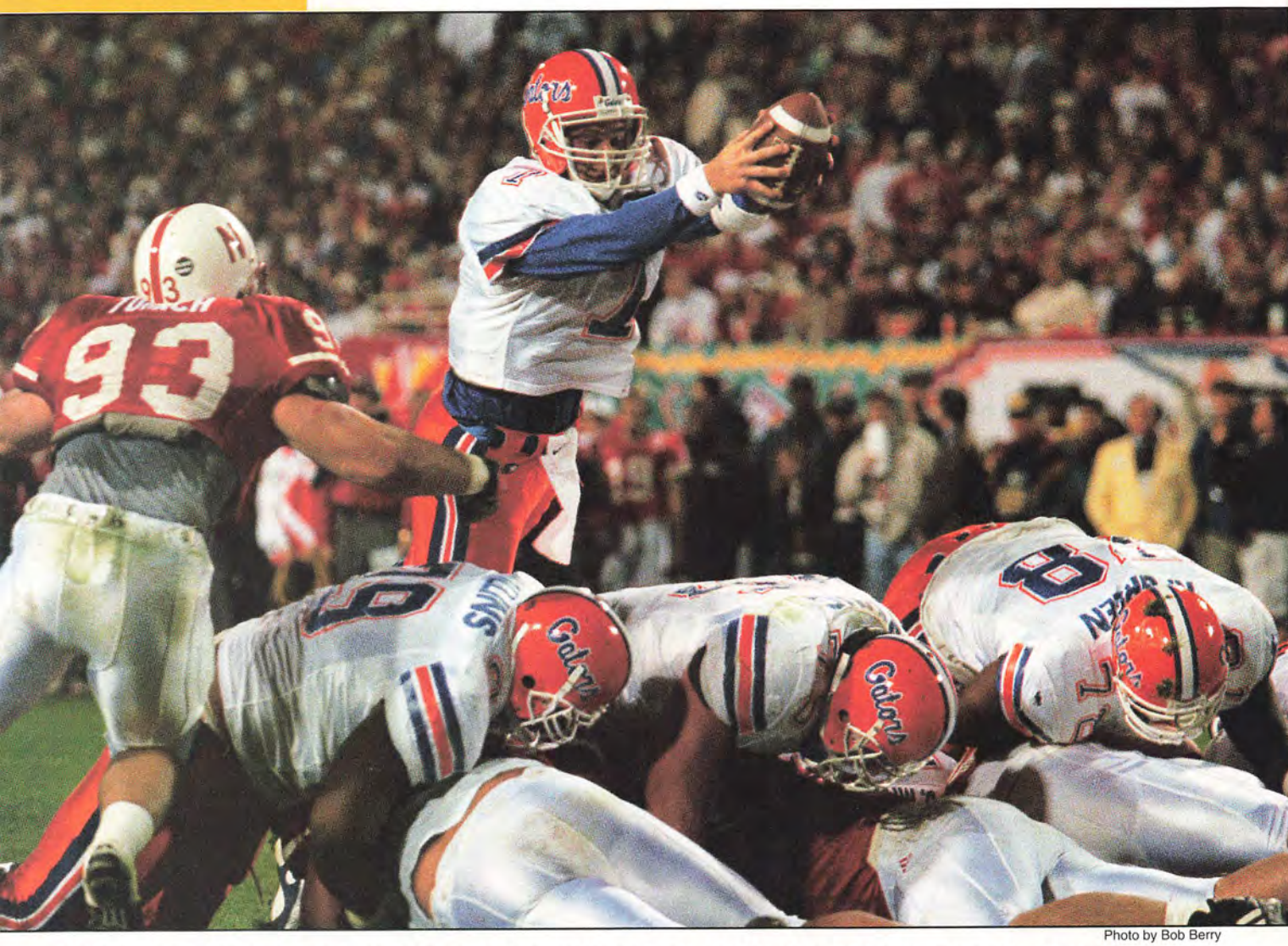

Photo by Bob Berry

Wuerffel put Florida on top for the last time with this one-yard scoring plunge late in the first quarter.

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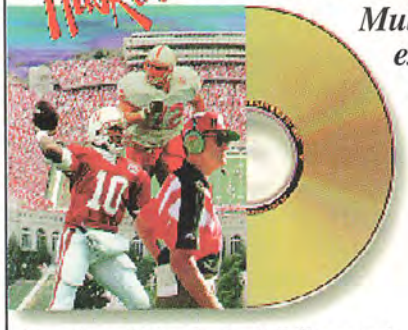

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slowed as they made their way into the stadium as hundreds of Husker fans pressed against barriers to get a glimpse of the team.

Thunderous roar of cheers and applause rang out at Sun Devil Stadium to greet the arrival of the Huskers for their pre-game warm-ups. One could only wonder what the reception might have been if this year's national championship game were to have been played in the Orange Bowl. Since 1991, Nebraska had not enjoyed a "home field advantage" in a bowl game.

Tempe, Ariz., which was set to host the Super Bowl later in the month of January, made the Fiesta Bowl its dress rehearsal. The night of the game, as helicopters, airplanes and a blimp circled the stadium, a huge American flag was unfurled on the field and parachutists from the Air Force Academy's "Wings of Blue" entered the stadium to

A Fitting Finale: Once believed to be down and out, Lawrence Phillips has the last word.

Lawrence Phillips' season on the run ended with a stroll through Florida's defense. Phillips dazzled the record crowd in Sun Devil Stadium with his fancy footwork against the Gators. The junior from West Covina, Calif., ran for 165 yards and scored three touchdowns in the Huskers' win over Florida in the Fiesta Bowl.

He then slipped away into the chilly darkness of the Arizona night saying, "I'm through with interviews."

It was a curt reply from the man who was cut up by the press for his off-the-field problems prior to and during the 1995 season.

Phillips' troubles began last summer when he was involved in an NCAA investigation concerning a complimentary lunch paid for by a close associate of a sports agent. Shortly after that matter was resolved, the NCAA looked into Phillips' lease of a 1995 Mustang convertible paid for by the California group home where Phillips grew up.

Until the Fiesta Bowl, the 6-foot-2, 220-pounder had not started a game since Sept. 9 at Michigan State, when he ran for 206 yards and four touchdowns. The morning after the Michigan State game, he climbed into a Lincoln apartment and assaulted his former girlfriend Kate McEwen, a 20-year-old Nebraska basketball player.

That incident ended any hopes he had of winning the Heisman Trophy.

Phillips initially was dismissed by Nebraska Coach Tom Osborne, who later changed the penalty to a six-game suspension. For the Huskers' final three games, Phillips was listed as the No. 2 I-back behind true freshman Ahman Green. He was the team's leading rusher in the regular season finale against Oklahoma with 73 yards.

Phillips finished the season with 712 yards rushing and 12 touchdowns on 96 carries, an average of 7.4 yards per attempt. He scored three times in the Fiesta Bowl, including the first touchdown catch of his Husker career on a 16-yard swing pass from Tommie Frazier.

A slip of the tongue by Osborne four days before the bowl game hinted that Phillips had discussed his professional career options with the Husker coach. At a press conference, Osborne told reporters it was a shame that Phillips' six-game suspension had to happen during "his senior season."

"He definitely has the tools to be a successful running back in the NFL," Osborne said. ■

Photo by Eric Francis

Phillips soared in his first start in more than three months. He needed just 11 carries in the first half to rack up 105 yards and become the first Nebraska player in 11 years to rush for more than 100 yards in a bowl game.

the light of hundreds of flashbulbs. A burst of fireworks erupted after the playing of the national anthem and entertainer Bill Cosby even performed the coin toss, which the Huskers won.

Lawrence Phillips returning to the form that made him a front-runner for the Heisman Trophy

Phillips hadn't looked this good since Sept. 9, when he charged for 206 yards and four touchdowns right to the front of the Heisman race. But 24 hours later, his career as an athlete was finished. He assaulted 20-year-old Nebraska basketball player Kate McEwen and the national media converged on Lincoln. What wasn't well documented was just how different Phillips' life became without football.

For starters, there was the food factor. With no access to Nebraska's training table and its well-balanced, nutritious menu of meals three times a day, Phillips turned to a diet of junk food and delivered pizzas. With no meetings or practices to attend, Phillips spent most of his time playing video games rather than tuning in to his normal staple of ESPN, because he couldn't bear the continual reminders of the incident.

And with so much taken away, Phillips had one more addition to his life — a weight gain of nearly 20 pounds that showed up in the form of a puffier, rounder face and slowed his once lightning-quick cuts.

But after fighting to regain his starting position in the last days before the bowl, rushing against the Gators — and their defense, which was ranked 25th in the nation against the run — came easily. He scored three touchdowns and racked up 165 yards on 25 carries. He left Florida defenders sprawled all over the turf as he slashed inside, dashed back outside and cut inside again.

His 42-yard touchdown gallop on the second play of the second quarter took a lot of the resistance out of Florida's defense and gave the Huskers the lead for good.

Just how the Huskers were able to so easily dismantle Florida's high-powered "Fun 'N Gun" offense can be traced back to a month of intense preparation by the Nebraska coaching staff that culminated with a focused effort on frustrating Spurrier and senior quarterback Danny Wuerffel, who finished third behind NU quarterback Tommie Frazier and winner Eddie George of Ohio State.

In the darkened South Stadium football offices of Nebraska's defensive coaching staff, several hours worth of Florida game film was charted, broken

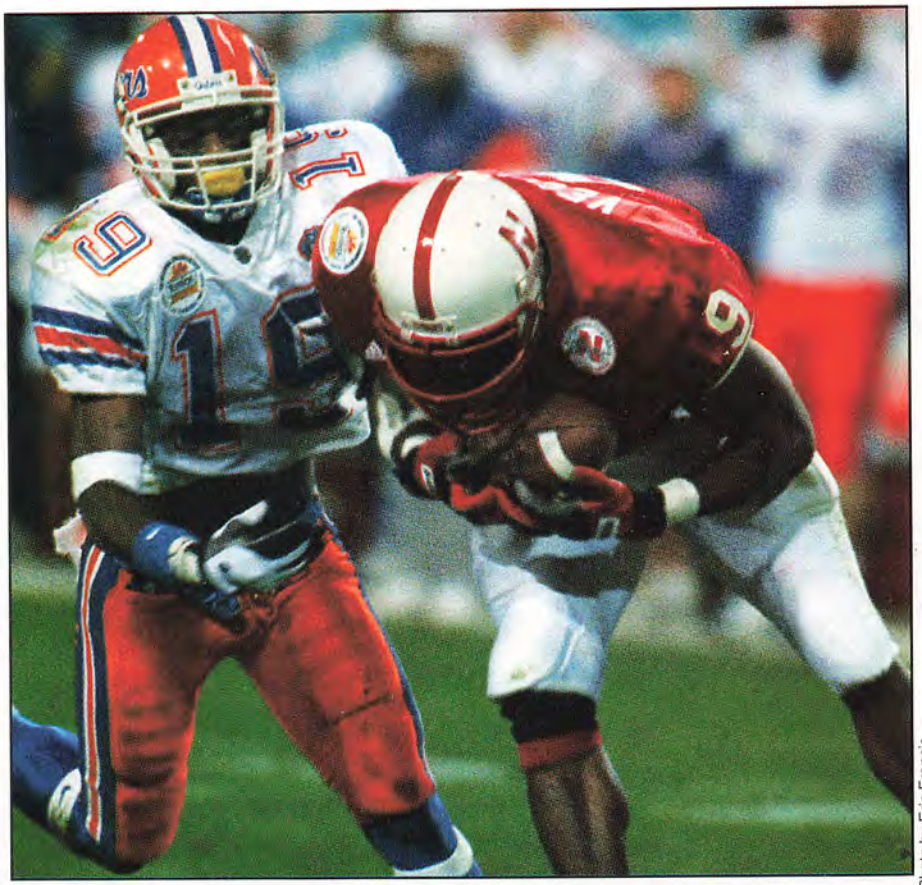

Photo by Eric Francis

"Hey let me talk and get out of here."

Florida Coach Steve Spurrier as he began his post-game interview

Photo by Eric Francis

Tony Veland's fourth quarter interception (top) was the only Florida turnover of the night the Huskers couldn't covert into a touchdown.

Despite some previous run-ins with the national press, Spurrier appeared to enjoy his time in front of the cameras at pre-bowl press conferences.

Star receiver Chris Doering caught six passes for the Gators in the first quarter but it was Husker linebacker Grant Wistrom who celebrated this third-down reception that left Florida nine yards shy of a first down. Photo by Eric Francis

Photo by Eric Francis

The pre-game tailgate party outside Sun Devil Stadium resembled downtown Lincoln on a game day.

Arizona Desert Turns Husker Red

A waitress at Hightops, a Scottsdale, Ariz., sports bar, didn't know how to explain why the bar had become a Husker hangout.

"This is my first night here," she replied. "I'm not from Arizona. I don't even know what a Husker is."

Luckily for her, the comment wasn't audible over the Garth Brooks song playing on the jukebox and the commotion being made by the Husker faithful.

If she didn't know on Dec. 29, she surely knew by the end of the week, as the number of Nebraska fans who traveled to the Fiesta Bowl in Tempe, Ariz., grew every day.

"I don't know much about the team," Hightops bouncer Jason Jarle said, "but the Nebraska fans sure know how to party."

Nebraska fans packed in the bar shoulder-to-shoulder the next night and spent the evening singing the school song, screaming Nebraska chants and comparing travel stories.

"It's very special," Kelle Wesgland of Omaha said. "It's thrilling to come to places and see it just totally red."

The Phoenix area received a taste of what every city playing host to the Huskers has seen for years — the Nebraska migration.

"Not everyone in this place lives in Nebraska," Mike Cunningham of Lincoln said. "But once you've been in Nebraska or have a piece of Nebraska, it goes with you wherever you go. You take that with you nationwide. I really believe that is why this program is so successful, because a little bit of Nebraska goes a long way."

This time it went all the way to Arizona, which nearly all the fans expressed preferred to compared to the Huskers' previous four bowl games at the Orange Bowl in Miami.

"A lot of people were tired of the hostile environment down in Miami," Sean Moore of Omaha said. "They were feeling like they were at a disadvantage because of the lack of fans in Miami, because they were always playing a Florida team."

> **"You won't find this kind of following at any other bowl game, it's incredible."**
>
> **Sean Moore**
> **Omaha**

Jan Schneberger of Grand Island, whose husband Gene spent the majority of their visit to Hightops leading a Conga line around the bar, said two previous Orange Bowls were the only bowl games she had ever attended.

"I love everything about this and nothing about the Miami area," she said. "That is not a desirable place to go. We just have a lot of fun here. We were going to come down no matter if we got tickets or not."

But Hightops wasn't the only place where people were sporting Husker gear.

Nebraska fans crowded the streets of downtown Tempe, and assembled around Arizona State's campus, the set of ESPN's Gameday show, and Sun Devil Stadium — site of the national championship matchup.

"You won't find this kind of following at any other bowl game," Moore said. "It's incredible. It's a sea of red every-

Photo by Bob Berry

Christian Peter's length-of-the field fumble return gained style points but nothing on the scoreboard.

down, studied and meticulously dissected over a week-long period in early December in an attempt to pinpoint a weakness in the Gators' passing game.

Defensive coordinator Charlie McBride — once criticized for being "out of touch" with the task of stopping the high-powered passing attacks of the late 80s and early 90s — was charged with developing a game plan to shut down the Gators.

"We absolutely had to get to the quarterback," McBride would go on to say after the game. "If we don't get there, we're dead. We're simply dead."

"We absolutely had to get to the quarterback,"

NU Defensive Coordinator Charlie McBride

They got there. Seven times in all. The intense pass rush was enough to keep Florida quarterback Danny Wuerffel from completing a pass to his favorite target — Chris Doering — more than two times in the final 45 minutes after hooking up with him six times in the first quarter.

On the offensive side, Osborne saw something, too. Florida's opponents tended to abandon their game plan — and particularly their rushing attack — once they fell behind. Nebraska knew it could pass its way back into the ballgame if it fell behind by a touchdown

Photo by Bob Berry

The Huskers' back-up offensive line made sure I-back Ahman Green had plenty of running room.

or more. But it would be better in the long run to maintain the ground game to stay unpredictable.

That mindset would pay off in the Fiesta Bowl when the Huskers rebounded from a 10-6 deficit with a 29-point, second-quarter scoring explosion that put them in control for good and comfortably ahead 35-10 at the half. Two touchdowns, two field goals by kicker Kris Brown, an interception return by cornerback Michael Booker and a safety from linebacker Jamel Williams left Spurrier, Wuerffel and the majority of the Gator players and fans looking shell-shocked as the halftime entertainment began.

The week leading up to The Game was relatively uneventful. The biggest story to come out of the Nebraska camp was when the NFL accused the Huskers of chewing up its carefully manicured fields during practice at Scottsdale Community College. Fiesta Bowl officials did their best "spin control," telling the NFL they'd pick up the tab for replacement turf. That led to Osborne and famed NFL groundskeeper George Toma making piece days before the game when Toma presented the Nebraska coach with an embroidered polo shirt that read "NFL Groundskeeper."

The minor hubbub was a far cry from the stir No. 1 Miami created in Tempe in 1987 when the Hurricanes showed up in army fatigues for a steak fry five days before their showdown against No. 2 Penn State.

The media — which had put Osborne and his Huskers on the firing line this season for the off-the-field trouble six players had encountered — was armed and ready in the final pre-bowl press conference on New Year's Day morning.

Osborne was under fire for the entire allotted 30-minute time period while

THE PREDICTORS: HOW THEY FARED

In our August issue, we asked eight Nebraska writers and broadcasters to give us their opinion on who they thought would emerge as the National Champion and the winner of the 1995 Heisman Trophy. (A rule of thumb for this year might have been: Go with the home team, but not the home player.) Here is a look back at their predictions:

Name, Media Outlet	National Champ.	Heisman Trophy Winner
Gary Java, KKAR Radio	Nebraska	Leeland McElroy, Texas A&M
Tom Shatel, Omaha World-Herald	Nebraska	Tommie Frazier, Nebraska
Dave Webber, WOWT	Nebraska	Tommie Frazier, Nebraska
Jeff Korbelik, Grand Island Independent	Florida State	Ron Powlus, Notre Dame
Jon Schuetz, KETV	Florida State	Tommie Frazier, Nebraska
Jim Rose, KLIN	Florida State	Tommie Frazier, Nebraska
Travis Justice, KPTM	Texas A&M	Tommie Frazier, Nebraska
Rich Roberts, KMTV	Auburn	Lawrence Phillips, Nebraska

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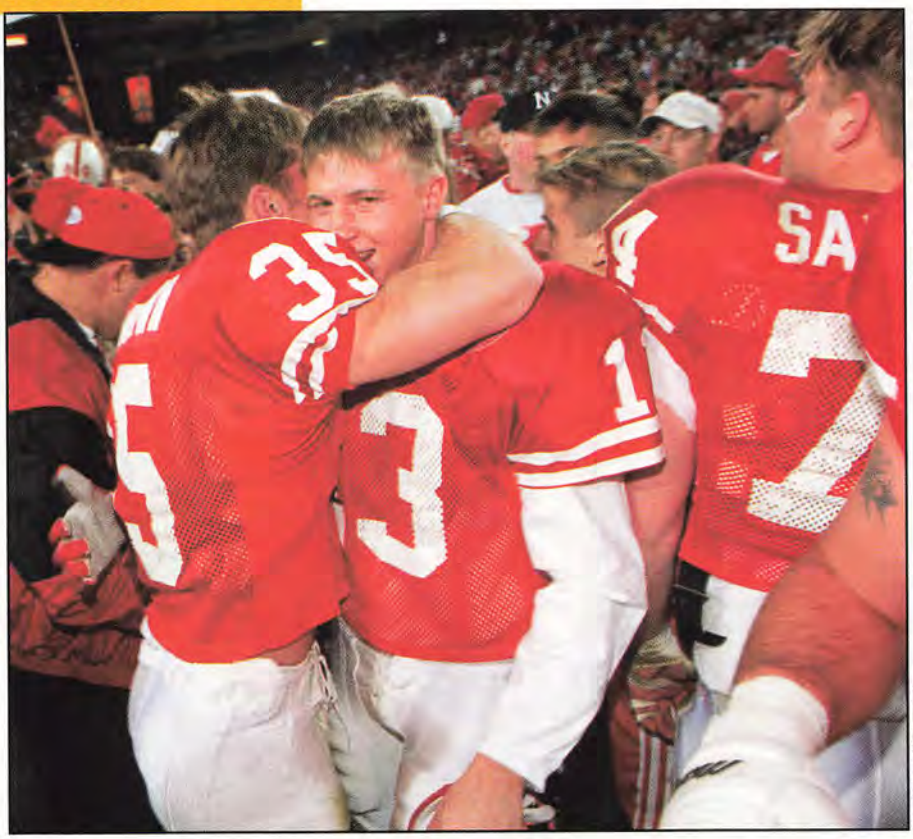

Photo by Eric Francis

Kickers Ted Retzlaff (right) and Kris Brown celebrated among the Husker fans who ran onto the Sun Devil Stadium field as the final seconds ticked down.

Spurrier handled a few softballs tossed at him while seeming to relish the limelight that had alluded his team for so long.

But that would all change when Spurrier's team fell apart in its first appearance in a national championship game.

"Hey let me talk and get out of here," cried Spurrier as he began his post-game interview. For the first time in a week, the Gators' coach was in a hurry to get away from the press.

To Nebraska fans, Florida was the unknown opponent. In fact, in the minds of many Husker fans, it didn't matter who the opponent was. Rather, it was a matter of winning one more game to secure a second national title and join Oklahoma and Alabama as the only schools to win back-to-back titles twice.

Part of the mystique about the Gators grew out of unfamiliarity. On a typical New Year's night, while Nebraska was teeing off against a Florida State or Miami team in the Orange Bowl, the last few years, the Gators had been butting heads with a West Virginia or a Notre Dame in the Sugar Bowl at the same time on another network.

And just what kind of tradition did the Gators have? Besides Emmitt Smith, how many fans outside of Gainesville are familiar with such notable Florida football alumni as Shane Mathews, John Reaves, Carlos Alvarez and Bobby Raymond?

For Nebraska, the Fiesta Bowl was its NCAA record 15th appearance in a "New Year's Day bowl" (Jan. 1 or second) while the Gators were playing in only their third "New Year's Day" game.

That relative newness to the pinnacle of the bowl scene may have explained a series of embarrassing mistakes by Fiesta Bowl officials. At one of the pre-game events, a video presentation listed Spurrier's career record as 61-12-1 at "Notre Dame." And the opening slide of a large-screen presentation heralded the 1996 Fiesta Bowl as a matchup between No. 1 Nebraska and No. 2 "Florida State."

Even Nebraska defensive coordinator Charlie McBride twice-made reference to playing "Florida State" at one press conference.

"That Florida State thing made a few of us mad," said Florida's top receiver, Chris Doering. "It's a little insulting."

Doering grew up a Gator fan. He

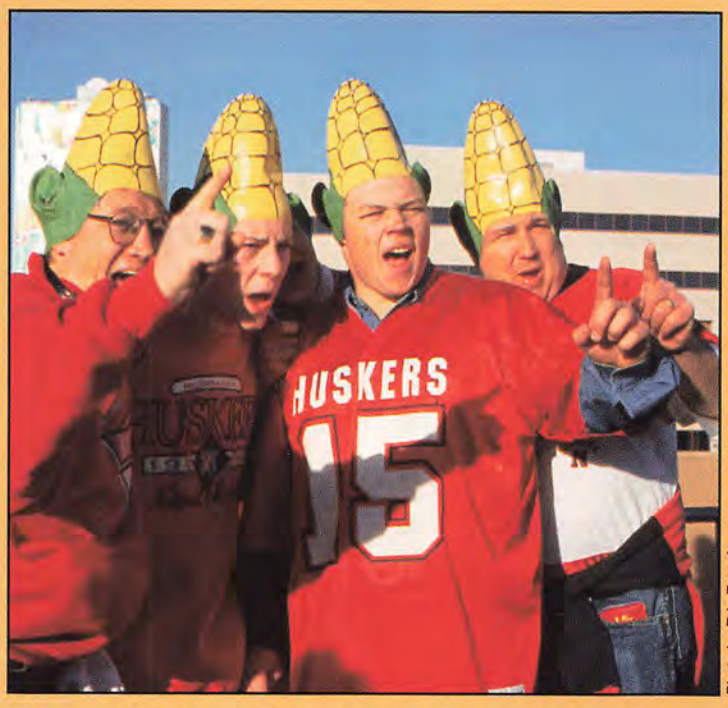

Photo by Eric Francis

Diehard Cornheads turned out in force in Tempe.

where you go. I couldn't imagine going somewhere else that doesn't have this kind of following."

Nor could Cunningham.

"I was born and bred in Nebraska and lived there all my life," he said. "I don't know if I could put following a losing team into perspective. I'm 33 years old and I've never seen a loser. If I was from anywhere else, I'd probably just convert to a Husker fan."

But something about this year's Fiesta Bowl, matching undefeated Nebraska and Florida teams, made the trip more important.

"I thought this one was going to be special," said Michael Beacom of Cedar Bluffs. "I've had other opportunities to go to bowl games, but I just knew this was the one I should be at."

So did thousands of others, and Tempe once again found out an obvious fact about Nebraska fans — host the Huskers, and they will come.

"The thing about Husker football is that you're looking at a state that doesn't have a whole lot more as far as athletics," said Jay Hancock of Omaha. "I think everybody puts a lot of time and effort into following the Huskers and it having such a tradition of being a big power makes it easy to do that."

But for some fans, attending this game was an obligation.

"I'm 16-0 on road games, so I had to come," Dan Wieberg of Omaha said. "They ought to look me up for every road game. I'm always willing to go." ■ By Derek Samson

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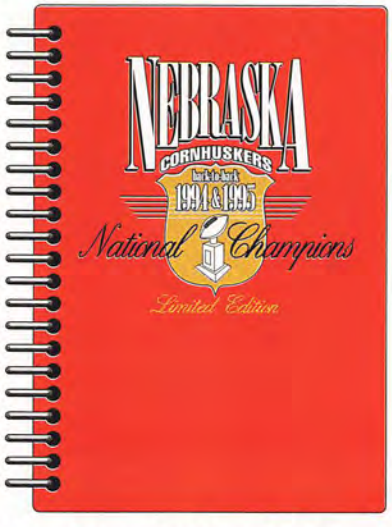

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"I thought it was possible we might win by a couple touchdowns if we played great football. The thing I was counting on was our defense."

Nebraska Coach Tom Osborne

Photo by Eric Francis

Even a post-game Gatorade dunking and an interview with CBS Sports couldn't keep Tom Osborne from smiling after the Huskers secured their second straight national title.

bleed blue and orange until one of Florida's assistant coaches took one look at his high school game tape and told him he didn't have the talent to play for the Gators — or at any Division I school for that matter. But the tall, lanky kid from Gainesville believed in himself and accepted Spurrier's offer to walk-on.

The rest is Chris-tory. As a sophomore, he caught a last-second touchdown pass from Danny Wuerffel to beat Kentucky in 1993. A year later, he snagged a short pass in the back of the end zone to give Florida a 24-23 victory over Alabama in the 1994 SEC title game.

But with his quarterback under a heavy pass rush that resulted in a season-high seven sacks, Doering was virtually anonymous the final three quarters. He finished the game with eight catches — six in the first half — and no touchdowns.

His performance was indicative of the dominance Nebraska had for nearly the entire game over the Gators.

And so it was that on a cool night in the Arizona desert — much like on hot autumn days in Lincoln — that the Huskers went home as winners again. ■

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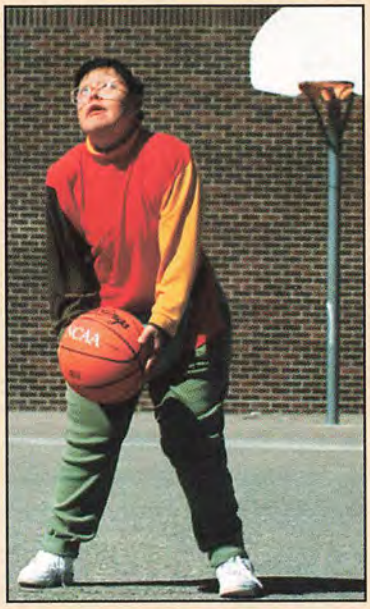

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	none	6	6	6	5	5	4	3	2	1

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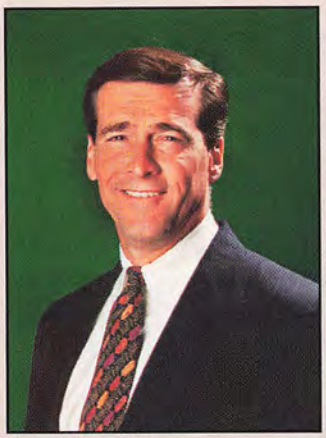

Focused on the Finish Line

Travis Soukup went to the West Coast with ambition like many others before him. But his wasn't the glittered dream of a Hollywood career. Soukup left his hometown of Seward, Neb., with hopes of becoming an NFL punter. Along the way, he has sidelined football to pursue a far more ambitious goal. We may see him next summer in the U.S. Olympic Trials.

Soukup made his mark in football at Concordia College, where he was a small college All-American tight end. It was his prowess as a punter that offered him hope of earning a regular NFL paycheck, so he hooked up with a private coach near Los Angeles to polish those skills.

Then one day in camp last May, the new student caught his coach's eye for something he did without the football. On the way to the practice field, Soukup — who stands 6-foot-4 inches — spotted a high jump crossbar at chin level so he nonchalantly leaped over it. In the conversation that followed, Coach Joe Prokop learned that his punting prospect had once scored 6,800 points in the decathlon as a college freshman. That's when the discussion turned serious. Prokop himself is a former decathlete and he recognized Soukup's potential.

A subsequent California visit by Mom and Dad Soukup finalized the new course of training geared to place their oldest son in the Olympic Trials next summer. Soukup is now seven months into a daily regimen that has trimmed his weight to a muscular 225 pounds while reducing his body fat to a lean 9 percent. He has surpassed every goal along the way and is actually ahead of his personal schedule.

That progress is a source of pride for Jim and Dianne Soukup back in Seward. It also helps ease any doubts they've had since deciding to finance their aspiring Olympian — the total outlay could reach $24,000 by the time Soukup gets a chance to prove himself. His parents, and others in the community who have donated to the cause, realize an Olympic dream has no guarantees.

There are several new indicators built into the training plan this month. Soukup will participate in selected events in local track meets on successive Saturdays. The idea is to regain the feel of competition with little emphasis on placement.

By design, his peak performance won't come until April of this year. At that time Soukup will have a tune-up decathlon behind him and he'll be primed to enter his biggest meet of the season with a specific number in mind. He must rack up at least 7,800 points during the two days of grueling competition to gain a berth in the U.S. Olympic Trials.

If that happens, the 22-year-old rookie will be big news. The leading contenders are on average four years older with about eight years of experience. Soukup is definitely a diamond in the rough.

Ask his mom and she'll tell you her son will sparkle before it's over. She's the one who wanted her son to continue with track in college. But a disagreement with his coach prompted Soukup to call it quits and concentrate on football.

Quitting at this point is out of the question. Prokop said the biggest complaint he hears from Soukup during practice sessions these days is an inquisitive "again?" (You'd probably have the same response if you were told to run another mile on a 40 percent uphill grade.)

The endless training is necessary because the mastery of 10 events requires a rare combination of speed, endurance, muscle and coordination. Soukup apparently is cut from that mold and he's determined to find out how he'll match up. The results will be of great interest to us here in Nebraska.

Just imagine where he'd be now if he had ignored the crossbar on the way to that practice field last May. NSM

John Knicely can be seen weeknights on WOWT Channel 6 in Omaha.

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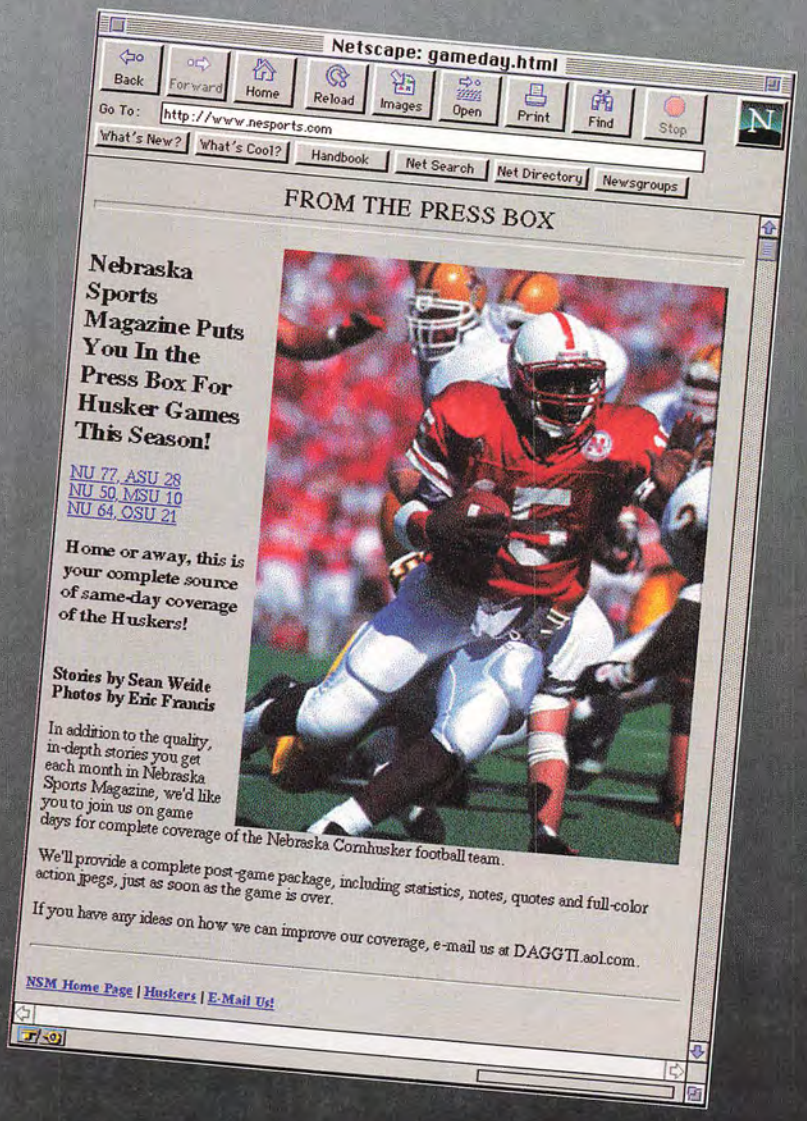
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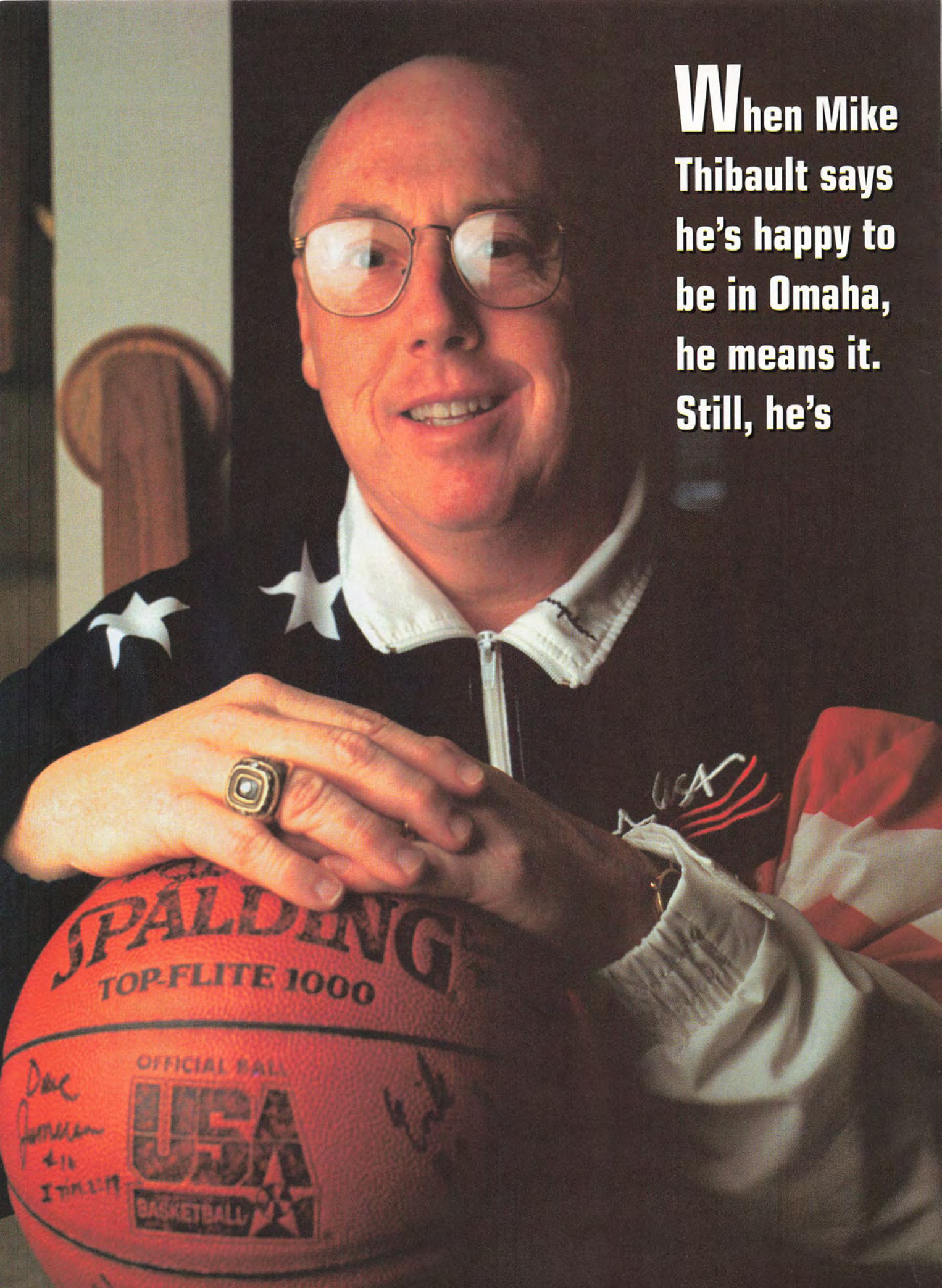


When Mike Thibault says he's happy to be in Omaha, he means it. Still, he's

keeping an EYE on the NBA

Story by Anthony Flott

Photos by Eric Francis

As soon as he fell to the ground, Mike Thibault knew his basketball playing days were finished. Not that his was a stellar career. Far from it. As a junior the previous year at Bellarmine High School in San Jose, Calif., Thibault was cut from the team and told to try again next year. That was a tall order for the 5-foot-9-inch Thibault, whose list of playing talents was even shorter.

Yet he kept plugging away, and as a senior survived the final cut. But then came that fateful day in preseason practice when Thibault soared as high as he could, snared a rebound and landed in a tangle of limbs with a teammate. The collision tore the ligaments in his left ankle. Worse, it ended his season before it began.

Little did he know that it would be one of the luckiest days of his life.

"It was my big break," he said, "and I didn't even know it."

Sidelined, Thibault faced a winter of discontent. Basketball was fun, but now it was time to get on with life. He planned to graduate, then enroll at San Jose State University as a music major. Whether it be with the drums or trombone, he would leave his mark as a professional musician.

That's when fate intervened in the person of Bellarmine varsity coach Hardy Ryerson.

"One of the guys who was the freshman coach quit, leaving an opening," Thibault recalled. "The varsity coach either felt sorry for me because I couldn't play, or he didn't want to pay anyone to coach. So he asked me if I would coach the freshman B team."

Thibault accepted the offer, setting him on a course he had not planned on traveling. Thibault's freshmen went 13-1 and won the league championship.

"I doubt I knew any better," he said. "I was kind of faking my way through it. But we got the guys to play hard. That's half the battle.

"I did have a pretty good mind for the game, kind of a point-guard's mentality."

His instant success raised his interest in coaching as a hobby. During his time at San Jose State, he continued to coach, helping a local high school team. It was enough to make him think of turning his hobby into a career.

He transferred to Santa Clara University, changed his major to English, and forgot about becoming a musician.

"I got hooked," he says. "I was going to become a high school coach."

How big was Thibault's break?

Shortly after his 10-year high school reunion, at the age of only 29, Thibault became the National Basketball Association's youngest assistant coach, helping the Los Angeles Lakers — with Magic Johnson and Kareem Abdul-Jabbar — to the first of their five NBA titles in the 1980s. Two years later, when he was an assistant coach with the Chicago Bulls, he was instrumental in the club's choice to draft a guard out of North Carolina named Michael Jordan.

More than a quarter of a century later, Thibault is still at it, pacing the sidelines, prodding players, berating

"I thought by now that Mike would be in the NBA. Unfortunately, the luck of the draw being what it is, he hasn't gotten the call up to the right job in the NBA . . . I guess the NBA's loss is Omaha and the Racers' gain."

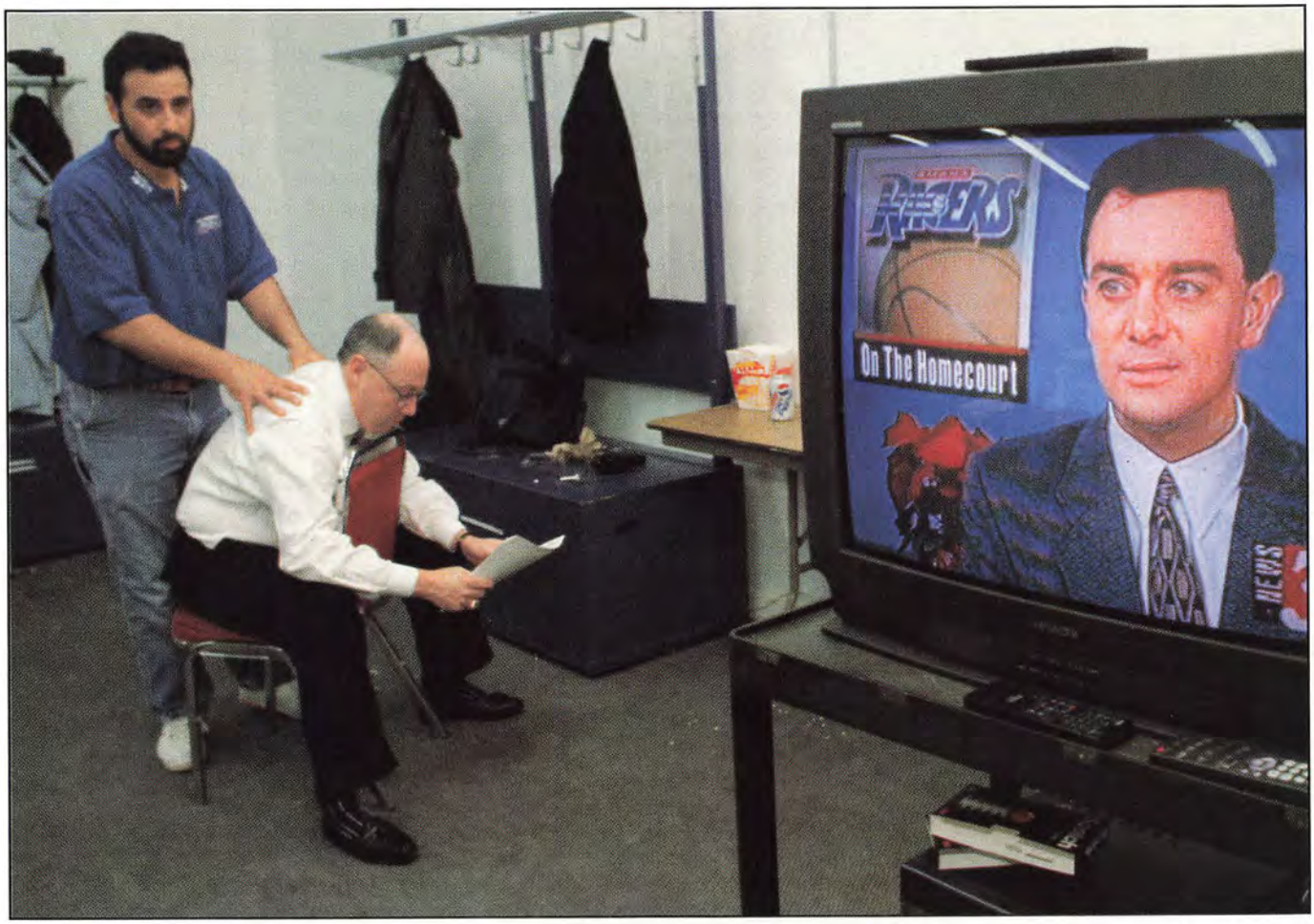
– Steve Idelman, Omaha Racers co-owner

officials, and still winning championships. But an odd thing happened somewhere in between. After his meteoric rise through the coaching ranks, including assistant coaching stints with two high-profile NBA teams, Thibault's career has been put in a holding pattern. Instead of the glitz and glamour of the NBA, Thibault is sweating it out in the grit and grind of the Continental Basketball Association, a professional developmental league for players and coaches.

Although he is head coach and general manager of the Omaha Racers, one of the CBA's more stable and successful franchises, Omaha was only supposed to be a brief stopover.

"My goal at the time was to prove myself as a head coach and get hired back in the NBA," he said.

Instead, he now is in the midst of his seventh season with the Racers. If ever



Thibault's pre-game preparation includes a chalkboard session in the lockerroom with his players (above) and a backrub by the team's massage therapist, Scott Kotzen, as he reviews a scouting report. (Right) The former Chicago Bulls and Los Angeles Lakers assistant coach is at his best when he's drawing up a play for a particular situation. "There is nobody walking the earth who understands X's and O's better than Mike Thibault," said Racers co-owner Steve Idelman.

there was a seven-year itch to scratch . . .

"I thought by now that Mike would be in the NBA," said Steve Idelman, co-owner of the Racers with his wife, Sheri. "Very honestly, after my first year here I was sure the most the organization would have Mike was one, maybe two years. Before the third season began, he was starting to get a good deal of attention from teams.

"Unfortunately, the luck of the draw being what it is, he hasn't gotten the call up to the right job in the NBA. He is definitely very knowledgeable about basketball and is a better basketball coach than at least several current NBA head coaches. It's been a little frustrating and heartbreaking along the way, but he's a professional at what he does. I guess the NBA's loss is Omaha and the Racers' gain."

Thibault has had the opportunity to return to the NBA, but the 45-year-old either turned down the job because he didn't feel the situation was right or he finished second in the running.

"It's frustrating, especially when you know you can coach and help a program and you think you're going to get it, when people tell you you're going to get it," Thibault said.

"That's just part of the business. But I have a good job where I'm at and that's the best part about it. Some people may think you're kind of banished here, but I don't feel that way at all."

The most recent opportunity for him to leave Omaha came just days before the start of the 1994-95 season when he was one of two finalists for an assistant coaching job under George Karl at the Seattle Supersonics. Thibault learned he didn't get that job when a reporter from a Seattle radio station called to ask him his reaction to not getting the job.

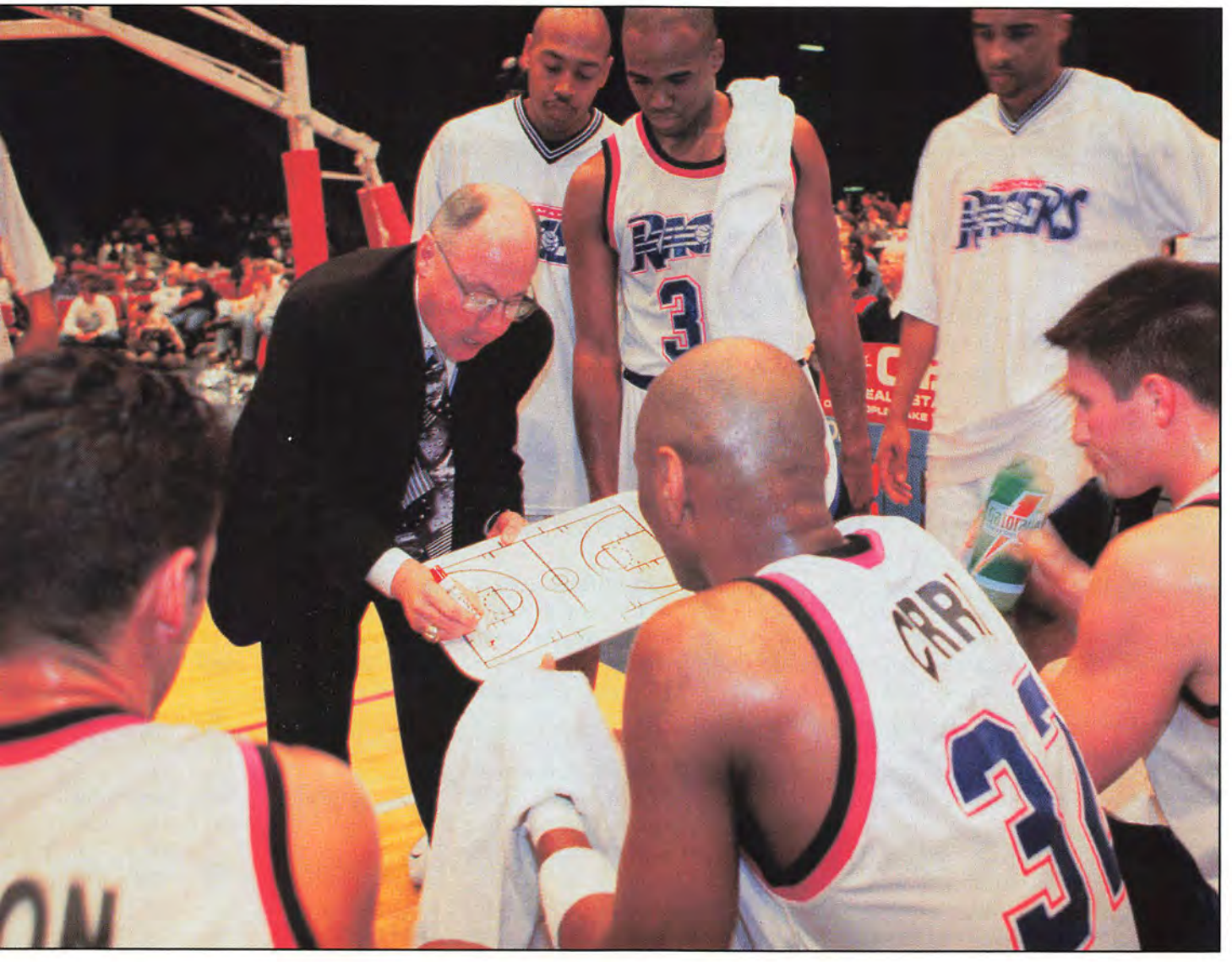
Idelman recalled another offer in the early 1990s that would have made Thibault part of Paul Westhead's first coaching staff with the Denver Nuggets.

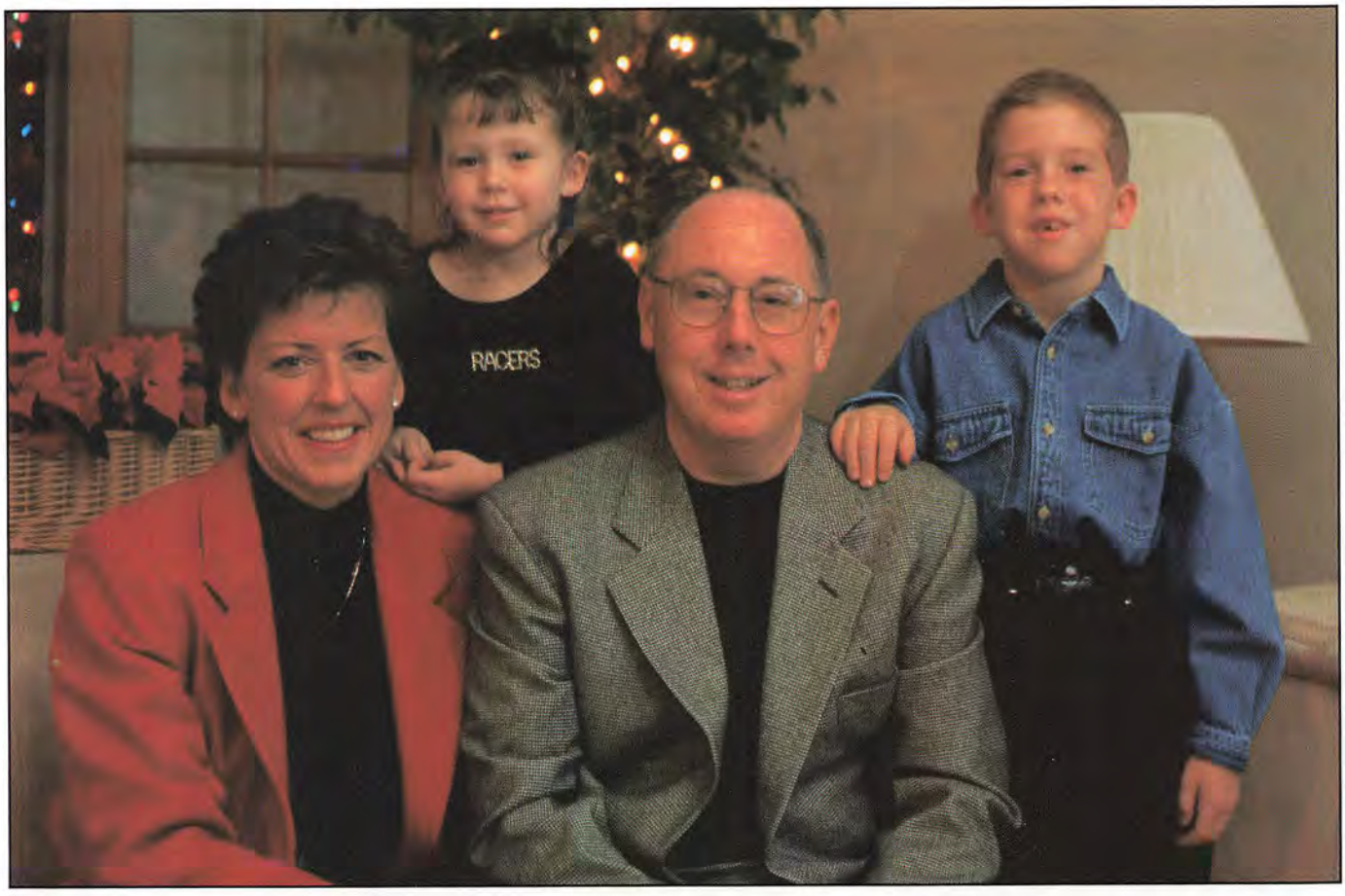
"But that was a decimated franchise at the time," Idelman said. "It was not doing very well. Mike was very patient, and he was comfortable in Omaha, so he turned it down."

Then there was the time in 1992 when Tony Barone left Creighton University, and Thibault was rumored to be in the running for the job. One of Barone's assistants, Rick Johnson, ended up being hired.

But it's the NBA that continues to hold the allure for Thibault. Has his absence from the league been difficult?

"I miss it once in a while," he said. "I'll miss it if I go to see an NBA game that's sold out with 18,000 screaming people. I miss the atmosphere. The coaching is basically the same.





The Thibault family relaxes at its home in West Omaha. From left: Nanci, Carly, 4, Mike and Eric, 8.

"I guess I also miss the direct flights," he added.

Considering his rapid rise to the NBA, one would concur with Idelman that Thibault would have by now secured a head coaching job in the league. But the current hiring trend seems to favor former players, minorities and head coaches fired by one franchise and hired by another.

Thibault said the longer he and his wife, Nanci, and children Eric, 8, and Carly, 4, remain in Omaha, the more difficult it will be to leave.

"My family likes Omaha very much," he said. "It will be difficult to leave, for my son in particular. He's into the school system, has friends and plays sports."

Thibault's first real basketball coaching job came as an assistant at St. Martin's College in Washington. During that time, he established ties with the Lakers and Clippers organizations, and eventually did advance scouting for those teams when their future opponents played in Seattle and Portland.

His work caught the eye of Westhead, then head coach of the Lakers, who hired Thibault as an assistant. When Westhead was forced out after the championship campaign, Thibault followed him to the Chicago Bulls. He stayed with the Bulls through several coaching changes — Westhead, Kevin Loughery and Stan Albeck — and was on the bench when rookie phenom Michael Jordan laced up his first pair of Nikes after he suggested the club draft "His Airness" in the 1984 draft.

Thibault's Racers office at Ak-Sar-Ben, which is overrun with sports memorabilia, includes an enlarged, framed cover of Sports Illustrated featuring a young Jordan and the headline: "A Star is Born."

In Jordan's second year, the Bulls pushed eventual champion Boston to the final game of a best-of-five-game playoff series. Jordan dazzled in the losing effort, turning in one of sports' most memorable moments with 63 points.

But it wasn't enough for Bulls general manager Jerry Krause, who fired Albeck and his staff following the loss. It was Thibault's first taste of the NBA's bitter side.

"That was a shock," he said. "I could have seen getting fired after a bad season, but Stan Albeck had done a good job and we were headed in the right direction. We took the championship team to the full games and things were going well.

"But Jerry Krause didn't see it that way. And he had hired Stan, which made it even more odd. There are no hard feelings, though, it happens to a lot of coaches. Look at Pat Riley, who was basically forced out of Los Angeles after five titles. And Don Nelson last year with Golden State.

"But to know we had gotten things in the right direction and not to see it through . . ."

Though it wasn't the end of the world, the firing left Thibault to take stock of his career. He spent a year away from coaching, running his own college and advanced scouting service for 14 NBA teams. But he was back on

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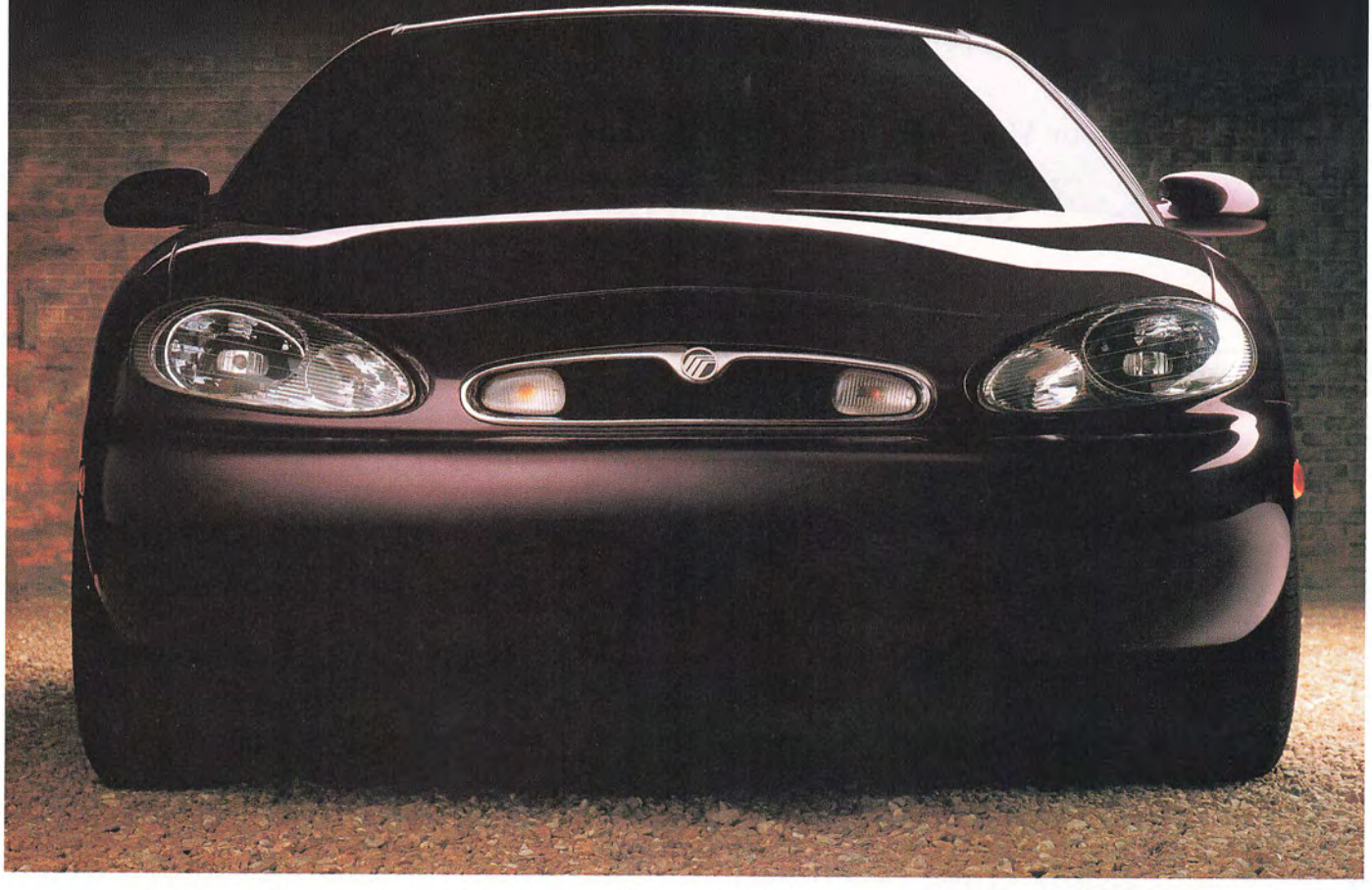

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the bench one year later as head coach, president and part owner of the Calgary 88s of the World Basketball League. Two years later, he left the game again, unsure of his future in coaching.

"I was going to work with a sports marketing firm and scout teams for the NBA," he said. "I wanted to get a year away from coaching."

But he could not stay away from the game. Shortly after leaving Calgary, Thibault was contacted by Los Angeles businessman Terren Peizer, who had just purchased a first-year CBA franchise in Omaha. He wanted Thibault to coach the team.

"I kind of got talked into it here. I had misgivings," said Thibault, who took the job just three weeks prior to the start of training camp. "It was going to be two years here and then I would go back to the NBA, college, whatever. I didn't even know if I would keep coaching."

One year later, Peizer sold the team to Idelman, a decision which initially escalated Thibault's desire to find a job with more secure footing.

"I had some doubts," Thibault said. "This is a hard business. It's hard to make things break even, and we lost money. But once Steve bought the team, things improved tremendously. We tried doing things the right way, first class. I became more in love with the job."

And the Racers fell in love with Thibault. He was an immediate success, posting a 76-36 record his first two years while making the playoffs both seasons. During that time, the Racers never lost more than three games in a row, a remarkable feat even by professional basketball standards.

The high point of Thibault's career occurred in 1993 when the Racers qualified for the playoffs on the second-to-last day of the regular season and went on to capture the CBA championship. Their thrilling run for the title included a pair of Game 5 wins on the road and impressive play by former Indiana University guard Jim Thomas, who earned 1993 CBA Most Valuable Player honors.

The Racers returned to the finals the following year, but lost to Quad City in five games of the best-of-seven series.

Those achievements earned Thibault an offer to coach a 12-member team representing the United States in the World Championship qualifying tournament in San Juan, Puerto Rico. He accepted and the team finished won six of seven games to bring home the gold medal.

Idelman said all this should prove to the NBA that Thibault is the right man for a head coaching job.

"There is nobody walking the earth who understands X's and O's better than Mike Thibault," Idelman said. "He is an absolutely tremendous worker and leads by example for this team. This is not a guy who goes through the motions."

That's what Thibault hopes the NBA sees.

"I've had NBA people telling me it is inevitable," he said, adding with a laugh, "But I don't see them handing me a contract."

Of course, he could always fall back on his second career option.

"I'm finishing the basement in my house right now," he says. "Once that's finished I've thought about buying a set of drums." ■

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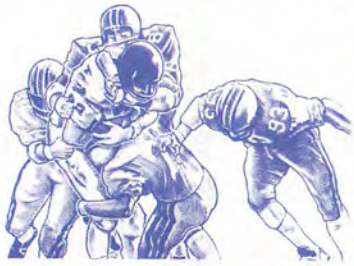

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The Nebraska Volleyball Team Decided Long Ago That Only A National Championship Would Do.

Story by Sean Weide

Photos by Bob Berry

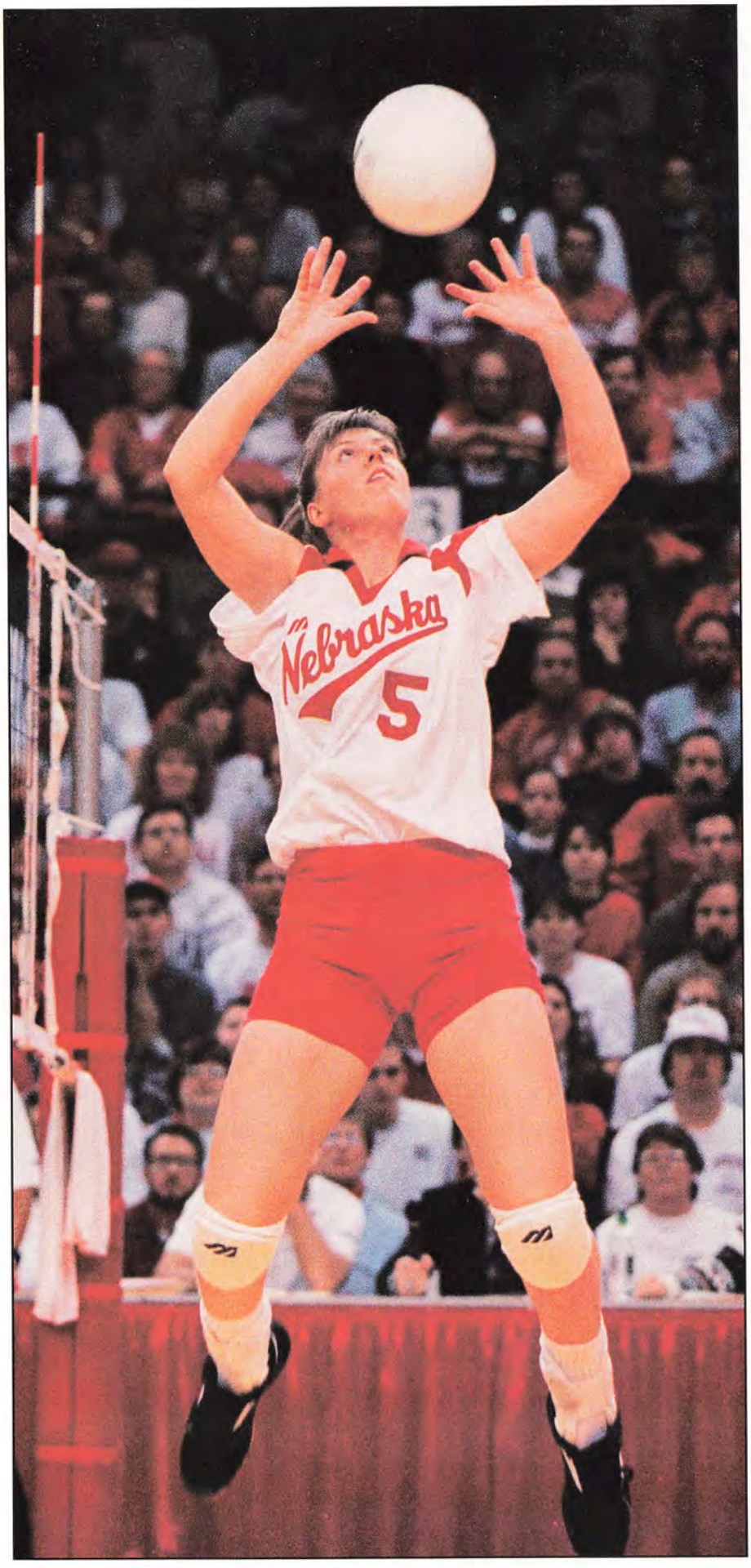
There was something vaguely familiar about the scene developing at Lincoln's Municipal Airport the morning of Sunday, Dec. 17.

The arrival of a white, yellow and orange Sun Country charter plane stirred memories of another welcome home celebration 11 months

When the Huskers returned to Lincoln with the national championship trophy, over 1,500 frenzied fans (left) turned out at the Nebraska Coliseum to greet them.

and 15 days earlier. The weather on that January day was the same as the conditions this day: chilly with patchy, overcast skies. And the people who turned out to greet the planeload of Husker athletes and coaches looked also familiar. Clusters of Husker fans, most of them decked from head to toe in red, pointed their fingers to the sky and shouted "We're No. 1."

The city of Lincoln had seen a celebration like this before.



There are numerous similarities between the Nebraska volleyball team's 1995 national championship and the national title won by the Husker football team in 1994. Both programs were steeped in tradition with a history of continual success. Both had coaches who motivated their players to play to the best of their ability while achieving success in the classroom as well. And when it came time to capture the national title, unsung heroes came through for both teams.

Terry Pettit is only the second volleyball coach in the 21-year history of the sport at Nebraska. He often is pointed to as being responsible for elevating the level of play in the sport on the high school level in a state that was not particularly supportive of female sports until the mid 1980s.

He came to Nebraska in the summer of 1977 from a small junior college in North Carolina where he coached volleyball and taught English literature. Married to the former Anne Denneler, Pettit has two daughters, Katherine, 17, and Emma Jane, 1.

Katherine was a two-time all-state setter who helped Lincoln East High School to a USA Today No. 1-ranking in 1994, only to lose in the state championship final to Bellevue West, which would go on to claim a second straight title this season and the No. 2 spot in the national poll.

Like football coach Tom Osborne, who toiled 22 seasons before winning a national championship, the big prize had seemed to elude Pettit. In 21 years of coaching, he had won more than 600 matches and guided Nebraska to 18 Big Eight championships and 14 consecutive NCAA appearances. And earlier this season, he became just the sixth women's volleyball coach to reach the 600-win plateau. His salary is $66,800 a year — roughly half of what Osborne earns.

The 49-year-old coach prefers a turtleneck and sweater to a jacket and a tie. He demands nothing short of perfection from his players. That commit-

Senior Christy Johnson, who entertained thoughts of transferring when she spent two of her first three seasons at NU sitting instead of setting, was reliable from start to finish.

ment to excellence was particularly evident after the Huskers demolished Iowa State, 15-4, 15-5, 15-1, in late November to take home their 18th conference championship in 19 years.

Despite the resounding victory, if someone hadn't turned the lights off at the Civic Auditorium after the match, Pettit likely would have put his team through a post-match practice session.

"We still have to get better. There is still a lot we need to work on," he said at the post-match press conference.

Pettit certainly will be reminded of his teams that fell short when the Huskers' national championship banner is raised to the rafters of the Coliseum in September.

The 1986 team, led by a trio of first team All-Americans — Tisha Delaney, Karen Dahlgren and Enid Schonewise — took a 28-5 record to Stockton, Calif., for the Final Four. But after an impressive four-game victory over Stanford, the Huskers were swept by a Pacific squad that lost just one game during the entire NCAA Tournament.

Three years later, the 1989 squad won 14 straight matches with a pair of first-team All-Americans, Janet Kruse and Val Novak, leading the Huskers to the Final Four in Honolulu. But after an easy sweep of perennial power UCLA in the semifinals, the Huskers lost 12-15, 0-15, 6-15 to Long Beach State in the finals.

Kruse and Novak returned the following year to help the Huskers make another title run. This time, Nebraska brought a 16-match winning streak into the semifinals while holding its opponents to a school-record low .135 hitting percentage. But those impressive numbers weren't enough to get Nebraska past Pacific, which thwarted the Huskers again in the semifinals.

The Huskers' march to the 1995 national title began, most fittingly, against Penn State — the same team that had dashed its hopes in 1994.

That year, the Huskers rattled off 31 straight wins only to be denied a trip to the Final Four by Penn State. After that loss, Pettit and his players sat down to map out the 1995 season strategy. What emerged was a clear-cut, no-holds-barred approach that was spelled out on the cover of the 1995 media guide.

"One Goal...One Focus...One Champion"

Junior Jen McFadden (No. 25) and senior Billie Winsett (No. 4) reached new heights in the latter part of the season.

Like football coach Tom Osborne, who toiled 22 seasons before winning a national championship, the big prize had seemed to elude Nebraska volleyball coach Terry Pettit.

It was discussed in meetings, before film sessions, during practice, during water breaks in practice, after practice, night and day, day and night.

"The goal-setting was easy," Pettit said. "Making the commitment to do the things to get there is the tough part. But the players did it and they've taken everyone else along for the ride."

There were concrete reasons that this year's team would be hard to beat. Senior Allison Weston was the Top Gun in the Huskers' arsenal of hitters that included senior Billie Winsett, a three-year starter and defensive specialist who spent her summers playing volleyball at the U.S. Olympic Festival; sophomore sensation Lisa Reitsma, a

towering, 6-foot-4 left-hander who can play outside hitter or middle blocker; and freshman Fiona Nepo, the 1994 Hawaii Player of the Year.

Running the offense for Nebraska was senior setter Christy Johnson — whose No. 5 jersey should join Weston's No. 18 in the trophy case — the latest in a continuous string of All-Big Eight and All-American Huskers at the position.

Hidden among the Huskers' big hitters was Jen McFadden, a junior from Dubuque, Iowa, who was a freshman All-American in 1993 but saw action in only 16 matches before tearing her anterior cruciate ligament. Coupled with the knee injury was a herniated disc in her lower back which required surgery last March. So serious was her rehabilitation that she wasn't even allowed to jump last summer.

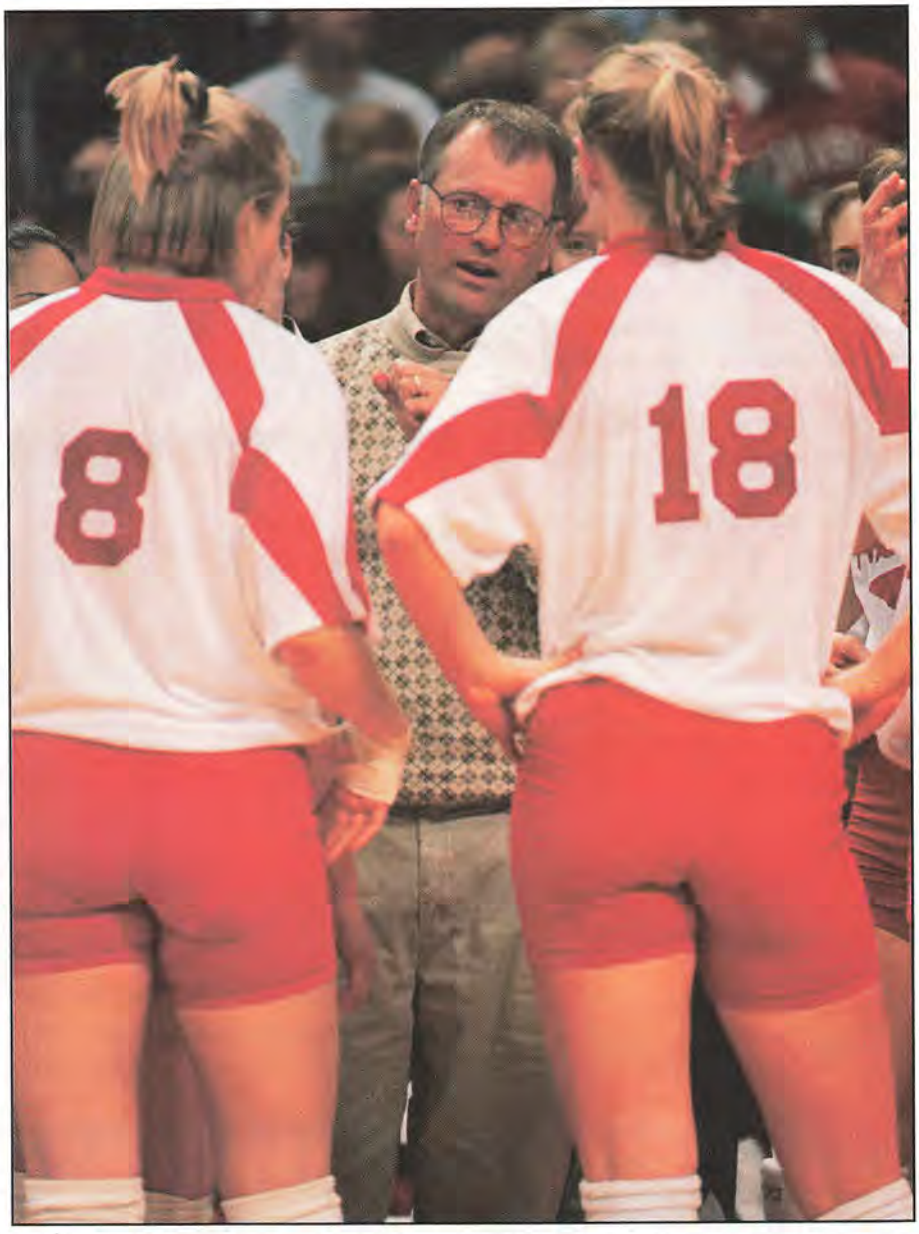
But eight months later, McFadden tucked away thoughts of her injury and pounded out 10 of her season-high 16 kills in the third game of the championship match against Texas.

Weston, the national co-player of the year, hit a paltry .040 in the championship match, which is roughly the equivalent of Tommie Frazier overthrowing his receivers on nine out of 10 passes. But the three-time, first-team All-American's 48 kills (30 of them against Michigan State in the semifinals) moved her into second place on the Big Eight's all-time career kills list.

"I'm glad her career is coming to an end," Oklahoma Coach Miles Pabst said. "She's been the consummate middle blocker from the start."

There's more to Weston than just volleyball. If you're an outdoorsman in Nebraska, you might run into Weston on some Saturday morning fishing at one of the state's parks or wildlife refuges next fall. Majoring in fisheries and wildlife, Weston has plans to work in the outdoors after her graduation in May 1997. She has a 3.7 grade-point average in a curriculum that includes science, biology and chemistry classes.

Nebraska started its title run on a warm September night at the NU Coliseum. With Weston hitting a school-record .824 percent (volleyball's equivalent of a baseball batting average) the Nittany Lions were no match for the second-ranked Huskers. The following night, in a showdown between the nation's top two teams, No. 1 Stanford silenced a sellout crowd at the coliseum by rallying from a 13-4 deficit in the final game to win 8-15, 15-11, 15-13, 17-15. The loss would continue to serve as a reminder of the Huskers' vulnerability.



Pettit made a concerted recruiting effort to surround himself with the defensive talent necessary to make a run at a national title.

The only legitimate challenge in the next 31 matches was a five-set win over Florida in the Huskers' second-to-last regular season match. Nebraska swept 28 of those opponents in the minimum three games while holding their opponents to five points or less 47 times.

So it was under a blanket of 10 inches of snow in the quaint northeastern town of Amherst, Mass., home of the University of Massachusetts, that the Huskers finished their run at a national championship.

Following a thrilling, five-set win over Michigan State in an afternoon semifinal match, the Huskers seemed destined to meet Stanford again in the NCAA title match. But the Cardinal may have been looking ahead to its chance for a second straight national title and instead lost to Texas in five games.

So in a sport once dominated by West Coast teams, the 1995 NCAA Tournament championship would see two future Big 12 teams square off in the first championship final matching two teams far east of California. And most of

the talent was home-grown. Six of the 14 players on the Huskers' roster hail from the Cornhusker state while 11 Texans filled the Longhorns' 16 roster spots.

"A few years ago, it would have been a rarity for two girls from one of our schools to make it to the Final Four," said Millard North volleyball Coach Deb Grafentin, who coached Nebraska setter Christy Johnson and Texas outside hitter Jane Winkle at the Omaha-area school. "But not anymore.

"In the future, more kids from Nebraska are going to be on Final Four teams — if not at the Division I level then at the Division II level."

Texas concentrated so much of its effort on stopping Weston that little-known outside hitter Kate Crnich — much like fullback Cory Schlesinger in the 1995 Orange Bowl — was able to step up and play the match of her life.

Crnich was an unknown coming out of Trinity High School in River Forest, Ill. Her only other recruiting trips were to Rhode Island and Alabama — two schools with volleyball traditions about as long as a Hollywood marriage. But Petit, who knew he had to bolster his

Dubbed "The Big Dog" by Pettit, Weston intimidated opponents as much as she dominated them over the last four years.

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defense to make a run at a national title, gambled on Crnich's backcourt skills.

Averaging just under six kills a match, the 5-foot-11 junior pounded out a career-high 25 kills and dug 21 balls off the floor against Texas, while hitting a team-leading .500 percent.

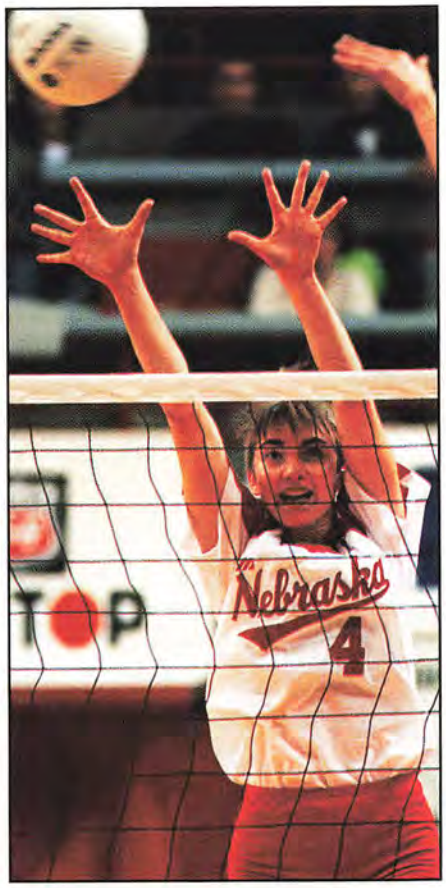
"I'm happy she picked today to have the best match of her career," said a teary-eyed Weston after the match.

Just how big was Crnich's performance?

"This was her best game in this country, in any other country, in the universe," Pettit said.

Texas concentrated so much of its effort on stopping Weston that little-known outside hitter Kate Crnich — much like fullback Cory Schlesinger in the 1995 Orange Bowl — was able to step up and play the match of her life.

Winsett, a senior from Boonville, Ind., who first learned how to hit a volleyball by practicing against the wall of her garage, also played her best when it counted most. She put together back-to-back career nights with 19 kills in the semifinal against Michigan State and 25 against Texas. Those performances



Winsett, who first learned how to hit a volleyball by practicing against the wall of her parents' garage, was hailed by Pettit as "the best passer I've seen in college volleyball."

"How 'bout them Huskers?!"

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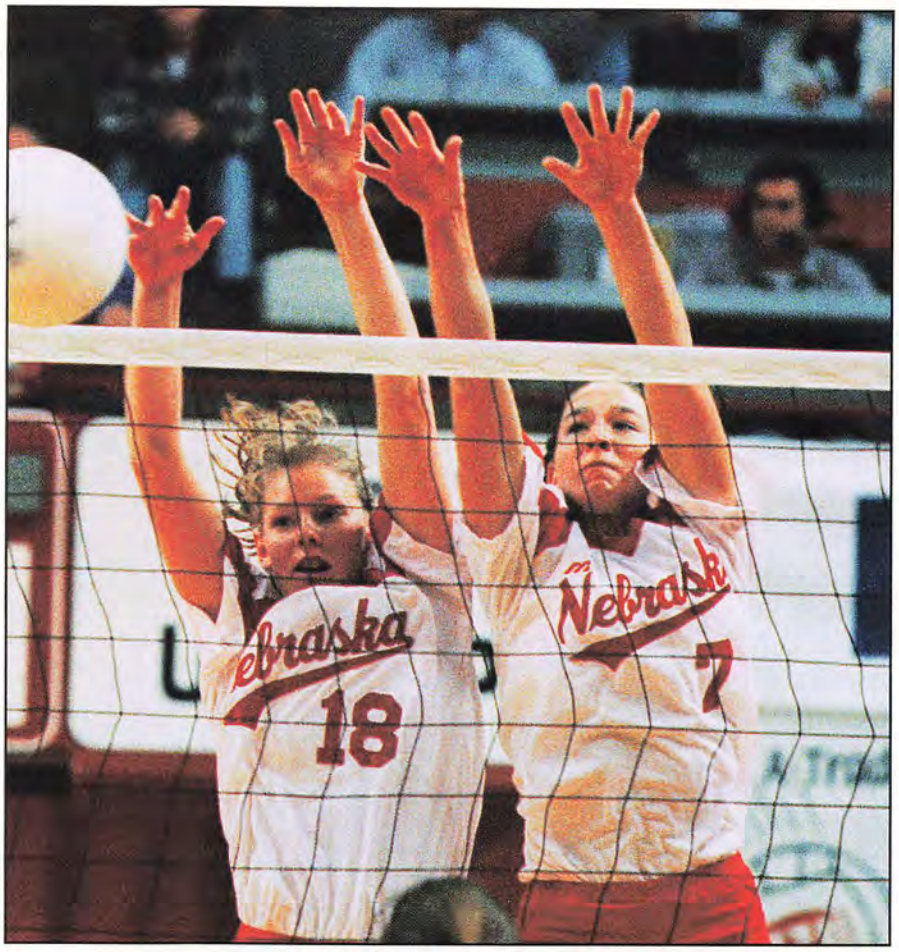
prompted Pettit to spill out words he previously had held back, in part to help the Huskers maintain an advantage.

"She's the best passer I've seen in college volleyball," Pettit said. "I never said that publicly before because I didn't want people serving away from her."

Pettit isn't likely to start talking up the talent on next year's team — which returns a plethora of talent in Reitsma, Crnich, McFadden, Nepo and in-state newcomers Stacie Maser, Jaime Krondak and Renee Saunders. But you might hear him talk about another dream, another unfinished goal of his that involves a smaller white ball and long stretches of well-manicured grass.

"One day I'd like to play a round of golf at Augusta," Pettit said.

You could almost see the wheels turning in his head: another goal had been set, there was another contest to be won and another celebration to be planned. ■



While Weston (No. 18) moves on, the accomplished Crnich will be back next year.

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The Panthers' Free Throw King

For some basketball players, a trip to the free-throw line can be as unnerving as a visit to the dentist.

Lining up alone, 10 feet in front of the basket and drawing everyone's attention isn't nearly as glamorous or exciting as a long-range three-point shot or a break-away dunk.

But for Ben Reis, getting to the free-throw line has been his forte the last three years at Norfolk High School.

The two-time, all-state guard not only has been successful getting there, but the 6-foot-2 senior also makes nearly every trip to the line a productive one. His career free-throw percentage of .877 percent has contributed greatly to his career scoring average of 17.2 points per game.

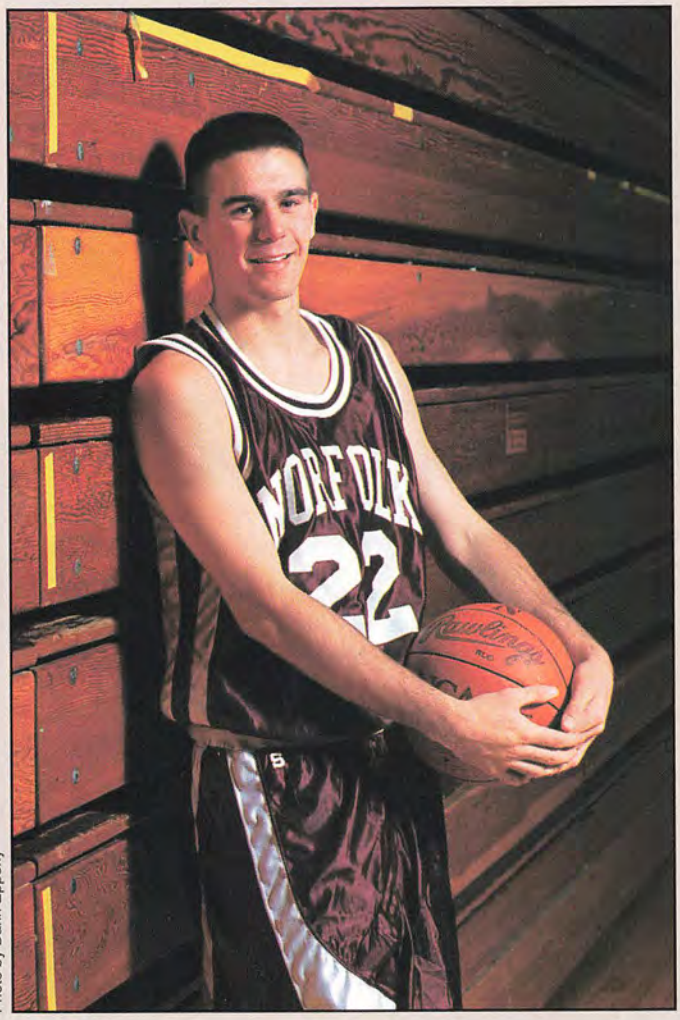

Photo by Darin Epperly

Ben Reis

Norfolk High School

Good free-throw shooting rarely comes naturally, and Reis (pronounced REECE) is no exception. To improve his 55 percent free-throw shooting in eighth grade, Reis began practicing — physically and mentally.

"So many people go to the line more mad than happy," he said. "They're thinking 'I wish they hadn't fouled me.' But I think of it as my shot at two points."

Not blessed with lightning-quick speed, Reis almost would rather draw a foul than blow past a defender for a lay-up. It's a goal of his, he said, to get to the free-throw line at least 10 times a game. During the past three seasons, he's done that many times, making 372 of 426 free throws, including 174 of 191 (.911 percent) during his sophomore year.

But it was his proficiency as a point guard that earned him a spot on the Valentino's summer all-star team four times, and with it a chance to play with some of the state's best players. He is Norfolk's career assists leader and currently stands second in career steals.

"Playing on those teams was really a stepping stone into my high school career," Reis said. "When I went down to Lincoln for a junior tryout before my freshman year and they called me afterwards to tell me I had made it, it was a big surprise."

But that impressive calling card wasn't enough to earn Reis a starting spot on Norfolk Coach Dave Oman's varsity squad right away.

"It was obvious his freshman year that he was one of our top five players," said Oman, now in his 20th season at the school. "But I was afraid to start him right away because that's kind of a delicate subject when it comes to seniors."

But the issue became a moot point just a few weeks later when one starter went out with a knee injury. Enter Reis, who was determined to prove that he belonged on the floor. Moments later, he did so by taking a charge.

"That kind of gained the respect of everybody on the team," Oman said.

This season, Reis has moved over to shooting guard to increase his scoring productivity and lessen the impact on the four new starters around him. His 38 points against Grand Island in the season opener followed a school-record 41-point performance (including a 16-for-16 showing at the line) in the Panthers' win over rival Columbus in the regular season finale last year.

An honor roll student, Reis said he's weighing collegiate playing offers from several schools, including Creighton, Cal-State Fullerton, South Dakota, Northwest Missouri State, Nebraska-Kearney and Wayne State.

"I'm kind of leaving the door open for anybody," he said. NSM

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By Brian Hill

For former Husker basketball coach Moe Iba, thinking back to the days at Nebraska means Bittersweet Memories

It should come as no surprise that Moe Iba will be inducted into the Nebraska Basketball Hall of Fame this season.

Iba posted a 106-71 record in six seasons, took the Cornhuskers to post-season play four times and earned two Big Eight Coach-of-the-Year Awards.

It should also come as no surprise that Iba doesn't know if he'll attend the festivities, scheduled for Jan. 27-28 in Lincoln.

"It's a nice honor; I feel very fortunate," Iba said recently. "I don't know if I'll come back. I've never been back to Lincoln since I left."

Iba walked off the court as Nebraska's basketball coach for the final time following the Huskers' first appearance in the NCAA Tournament: a 67-59 loss to Western Kentucky in the Southeast Sub-Regional in Charlotte, N.C., on March 14, 1986.

Iba handed his resignation to Don Bryant, Nebraska sports information director and assistant athletic director, on his way to the locker room, ending a 19-11 season that should have been one of the most exciting in recent history. The Huskers, expected to fold after senior center Dave Hoppen went down with a season-ending knee injury on Feb. 1, put together a determined stretch run to make the NCAA field.

But while Nebraska was putting together its successful finish, rumors swirled, letters to the editor criticizing Iba continued to pour in, and "Moe must go" chants — and some others not as kind — rang out in the student section. The season had started off on a controversial note, as the Huskers were found to have conducted an illegal practice in early October. In a Lincoln Journal-Star poll, 33 percent of those surveyed said Iba should be retained as head coach, 24 percent said no and a whopping 43 percent had no opinion.

"He's been taking a lot of heat all year. In fact, we all have," junior guard Brian Carr told the Lincoln Journal-Star at the time. "He's the kind of guy who's going to do things his way, and if he doesn't like it, he'll get out. You've got to be happy. That's the important thing, and right now, he's not happy."

By the time Iba submitted his resignation, Nebraska already had been looking for a new coach. Current

Iba handed his resignation to Don Bryant, Nebraska sports information director and assistant athletic director, on his way to the locker room, ending a 19-11 season that should have been one of the most exciting in recent history.

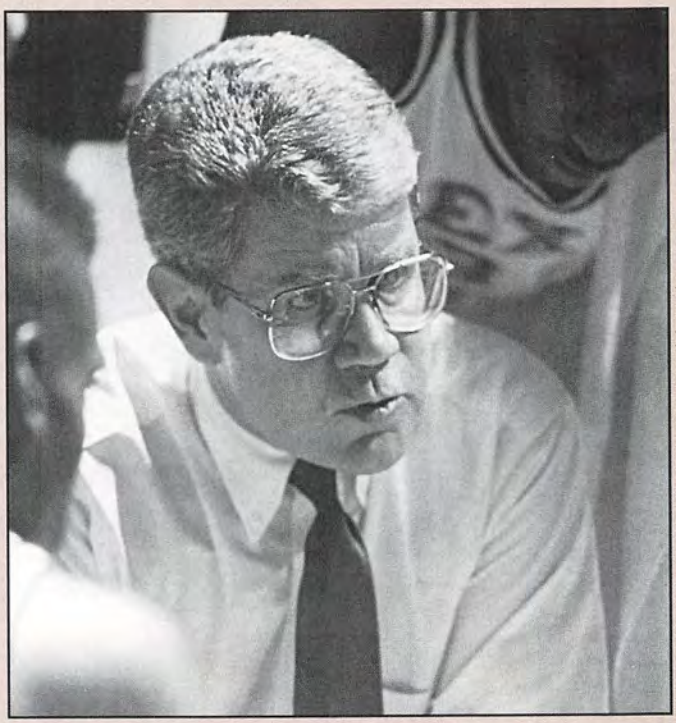

Photo courtesy of Texas Christian University sports information

After leaving Nebraska, Iba spent one year as an assistant at Drake and seven seasons at TCU.

Photo courtesy of Nebraska sports information

The high point of Iba's career at Nebraska occurred in 1983, when the Huskers went 22-10 and reached the semifinal round of the National Invitation Tournament.

Nebraska Coach Danny Nee, then the head coach at Ohio University, had confirmed earlier in the week that NU Athletic Director Bob Devaney had contacted him.

Iba, rumored at the time to be a candidate for the University of Texas at San Antonio coaching job, served as an assistant for one season at Drake before moving on to Texas Christian as head coach in 1987. Iba led the Horned Frogs for seven seasons, resigning after a 7-20 season in 1993-94.

Despite the setbacks, Iba still loves the game. He served as an advance scout for the NBA's Detroit Pistons last year and is serving in that capacity — reporting on future opponents — this season for the Toronto Raptors and Indiana Pacers.

"I had almost 50 games last year and about 30 to 35 this year," Iba said. "I enjoy it."

He said the pro game isn't that much different than the college version.

"It's the same game, just different rules," Iba said. "Basketball is basketball."

The son of the late Henry P. Iba, the legendary Oklahoma State and Olympic coach, he has always been close to the game. His father ranks No. 4 in victories — behind Adolph Rupp, Clarence "Big House" Gaines and Dean Smith — among coaches in all divisions, with a 767-338 record.

"You hear how some kids might be resentful of having a famous father," Iba said in a 1982 Omaha World-Herald story. "In my case it was a bonus — he provided all of the equipment for me to play football, basketball, tennis, golf, baseball, whatever I wanted.

"When I was only 5 years old, I could go to Oklahoma State basketball practices. I was allowed to shoot baskets. There was only one rule for me — when my father was talking to

Photo by Olaf Growald

Iba and his wife, Cindy, now make their home in Fort Worth, Texas, where he continues to scout for several NBA teams.

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the team, I was never to dribble the ball."

Iba started three years at guard for his father at Oklahoma State. He set a Big Eight season free throw percentage record of .926 in 1960-61, which stood until one of his own players — the late Jack Moore — broke it with a .939 mark in 1981-82.

After graduating from OSU, Iba spent four years as an assistant to Don Haskins at Texas Western (now Texas-El Paso). He spent four years as head coach at Memphis State before moving to Nebraska to replace Glen Potter as an assistant to Joe Cipriano.

"I will always appreciate this move because Joe and I became very close," Iba told the World-Herald. "He kept me in basketball. The three most important men in my life have been my father, Don Haskins and Joe."

Iba served eight years as Cipriano's top assistant, then one year as assistant head coach when illness struck Cipriano in 1979-80, and one year as acting head coach immediately following Cipriano's death on the eve of the 1980-81 season.

Iba's 1982-83 team earned a National Invitation Tournament Final Four berth in New York and finished 22-10. That team and his final Husker team were his best, Iba said.

"The '86 team, if we'd had Hoppen, would have been the best," Iba said. "With Hoppen, it was. Our team that went to the NIT Final Four Hoppen's freshman year was awfully good, but if he hadn't got hurt, the team his senior year would have been the best."

Hoppen, the leading scorer in Nebraska basketball history, is also in this year's Hall of Fame class.

"David was a great player," Iba said. "It's a shame he hurt his leg. David did a lot for the University of Nebraska by going to school there."

And, despite the way it ended, Iba's Nebraska stay wasn't all bad.

"We were there as long as we've been any place," Iba said. "It was an awfully good time in our family's life. We enjoyed Lincoln and the state a lot."

The Ibas live in Fort Worth, Texas, home of his most recent coaching assignment TCU. Oldest son Bret is now an assistant at Toledo (Ohio), which earlier this season played Nebraska in the Big Island Invitational in Hilo, Hawaii.

Iba, 56, said he isn't sure what the future will bring.

"I've really enjoyed the last couple of years," he said. "I'm spending some time with my family. I golf two or three times a week. The scouting keeps me busy during the basketball season. I'm just trying to decide what to do in the future. Right now, I don't know." NSM

Iba's NU Highlight: Win Over No. 1 Tigers

Moe Iba coached at Nebraska from 1980 to 1986. The highlight of his career came during the 1981-82 season when NU upset previously unbeaten and top-ranked Missouri, 67-51. "We heard from people all over the country after that win," said Iba's wife, Cindy.

Year	Record	Big Eight	Conference finish
1979-80*	18-13	8-6	Tie for second
1980-81	15-12	9-5	Tie for second
1981-82	16-12	7-7	Tie for fourth
1982-83	22-10	9-5	Tie for third
1983-84	18-12	7-7	Third
1984-85	16-14	5-9	Tie for fifth
1985-86	19-11	8-6	Third

*Iba served as the Huskers' assistant head coach.

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UNK Volleyball Reaches NCAA 'Elite Eight'

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Angie Usher

Chris Hughes

Danielle Shum

Nebraska-Kearney sports information (4)

This year's University of Nebraska at Kearney volleyball team made history by becoming the school's first athletic squad to advance to an NCAA Division II championship.

The Lopers won 19 straight matches before seeing their season end at the hands of Central Missouri State in the quarterfinals at the Health and Sports Center on the campus of Barry University in Miami Shores, Fla.

UNK lost the first two games to the Jennies, 15-13, 15-13, but rallied to a relatively easy win in game three, needing just 15 minutes to claim a 15-7 decision. But the Jennies came back to end the match with a 15-7 win in game four.

The Lopers finished the season with a 34-4 record and a No. 6 ranking in the final American Volleyball Coaches Association poll. The University of Nebraska at Omaha, with a 22-9 record, was 14th.

Setter Danielle Shum earned Rocky Mountain Athletic Conference Player of the Year while middle blocker Chris Hughes and outside hitter Angie Usher joined Shum on the all-conference first team.

Shum, a graduate of Bellevue East, led the conference in assists. Hughes (Ainsworth) ranked third in the RMAC in hitting percentage and Usher (Lincoln Northeast) was third in the conference in service aces.

UNK Coach Patty Sitorius was named Northwest Region Coach of the Year for guiding the Lopers to their first-ever trip to the Elite Eight. She has amassed a 103-21 record in her three years at the school and has a career coaching record of 330-97. NSM

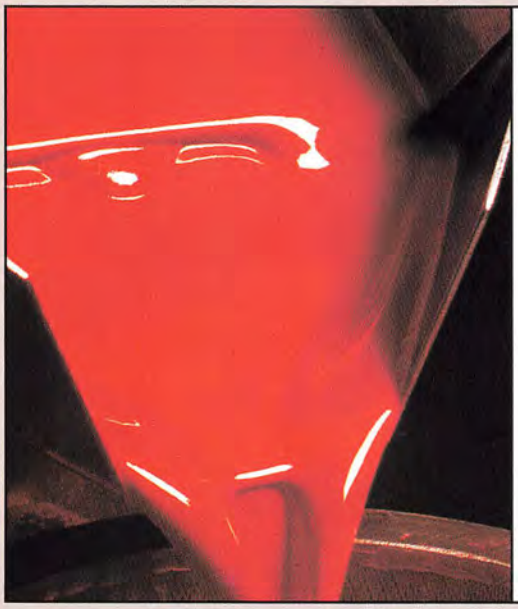
Crowd of 3,316 Breaks National Record

The University of Nebraska at Kearney became the new holder of the NCAA Division II attendance record during the Northwest Regional tournament in November.

A crowd of 3,316 watched the match between the Lopers and Portland State.

That total exceeded the 3,188 who watched a match between Portland State and West Texas A&M in 1990.

UNK has posted seven of the top 16 NCAA Division II all-time single match attendance marks.



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Neb. Wesleyan Places Three On GTE Academic All-America Team

Nebraska Wesleyan University soccer players Lynette Baker of Lincoln and Sandy Shaneyfelt of Omaha joined football player Justin Rice of Grand Island as first-team GTE Academic All-Americans.

Wesleyan placed more players on the 1995 team than any other school.

Rice, a junior defensive end who led the Plainsmen with 9.5 quarterback sacks, has a 3.75 grade point average. Baker, a junior with a 3.77 G.P.A., scored 10 goals and had nine assists from her forward position. Shaneyfelt, a senior with a 4.0 G.P.A., scored six goals and had six assists as a midfielder.

The GTE Academic All-American College Division Football Team is selected from all of the NCAA Division II, Division III and NAIA schools across the country. NSM

Lynette Baker

Athletic Club Dedicates Year To Fallen Star

The Kingswood Athletic Association of Omaha will dedicate its first season of wrestling to former club standout Nathan E. Aadland, who died in a car accident in late November.

Aadland was a member of the Panthers' football team which won the 1991 national championship and also starred on the Omaha-based club's baseball and basketball teams. NSM

Nebraskans Help Benedictine Football Team To 9-1 Record

Six football players from Nebraska high schools played prominent roles for Benedictine College during its remarkable 1995 season.

Dan VanAnne, a junior quarterback from Elkhorn, was named the Offensive Player of the Year in the Heart of America Conference. Joining him on the all-conference first team was junior place kicker Dan Ruch (Omaha Creighton Prep), senior offensive guard David Perez (Omaha Gross) and junior tight end Danny Neill (Papillion-LaVista). Sophomore Eric Pitts (Palmyra) and junior Dan Kenny (Creighton Prep) alternated at fullback.

Other contributors for the Swedes from Nebraska were Neill's older brother, George, offensive line; Mike Jernigan, Omaha Westside, special teams and Robert Marin, Millard South, defensive back.

Benedictine won all nine of its regular season games and climbed as high as No. 3 in the NAIA Division II rankings.

But the Swedes couldn't get past undefeated Bethany College in the first round of the playoffs, losing 30-29 on a field goal in the closing seconds. NSM

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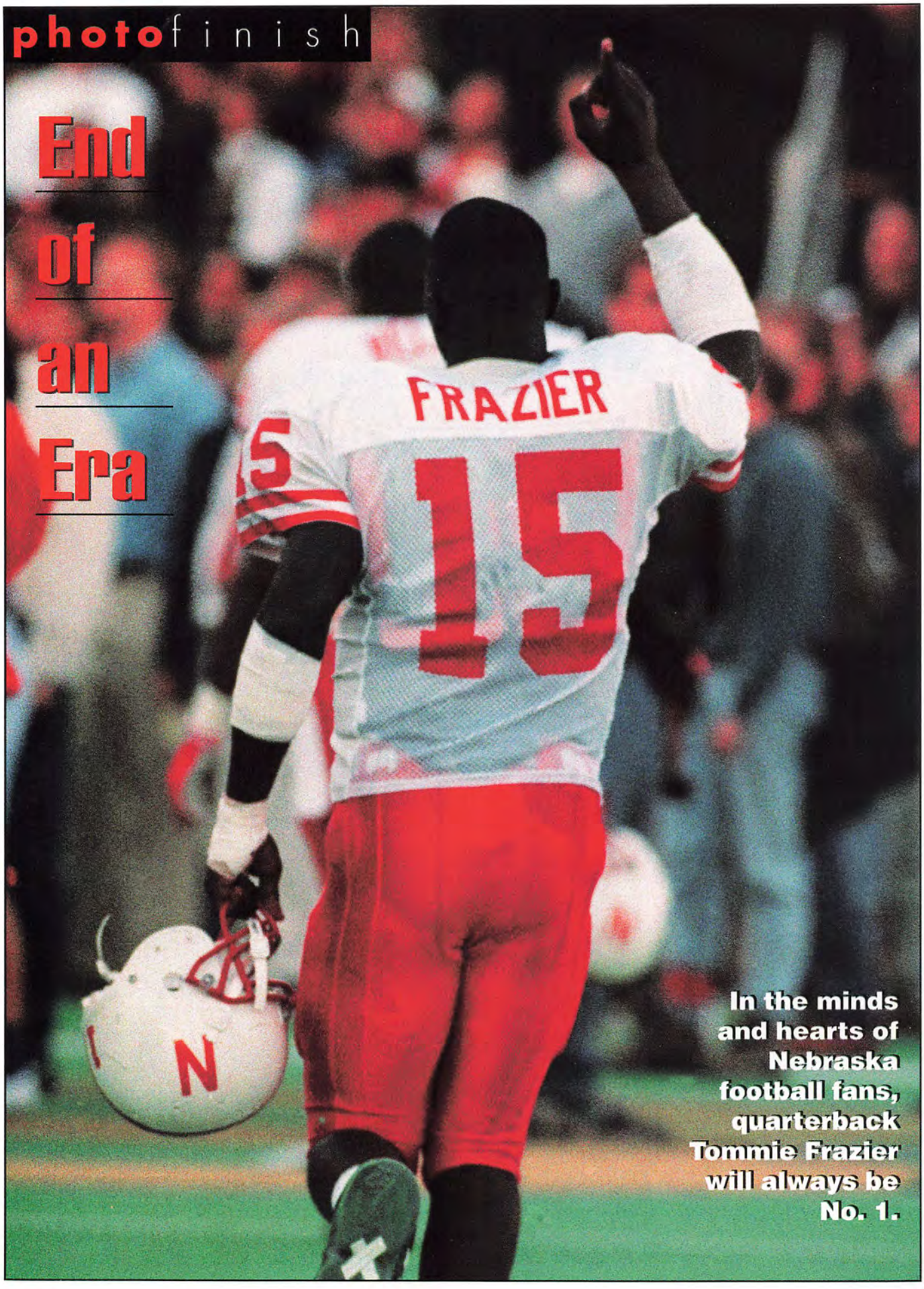

In the minds and hearts of Nebraska football fans, quarterback Tommie Frazier will always be No. 1.

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